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# **CHRIST IN INDIAN POETRY-1**

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**Edited by  
Jacob Parappally**

# **JEEVADHARA**

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# jeevadhara

A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

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## Christ in Indian Poetry -1

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## Editorial

Poetry makes up for the poverty of language to communicate any experience properly. Even poetry can articulate only to a certain extent an experience of a person whatever that experience may be. All languages suffer from this inadequacy when it comes to articulate any experience. This is all the more true of religious experience. An authentic religious experience affects a person so radically that it gifts her or him a new vision of the Ultimate Reality, humans and their world. This cannot be expressed in any ordinary use of language. It needs symbols, metaphors, myths and imageries for articulating the experience that this narration in turn can become a means for others to come to know and to encounter the Reality communicated through it. Religious language that expresses religious experience is descriptive and evocative. It also uses symbols, metaphors, myths and imageries to communicate the truths about religious experience. Mystics and prophets of all religions struggle to articulate their deep religious experience of the Ineffable through the medium of language available to them, knowing fully well that their expressions fall short of their experience.

The God-encounter of Israel in the Old Testament and the Abba-experience of Jesus and the experience of the Risen Lord by the disciples and the early Church narrated in the New Testament use sometimes poetic language replete with metaphors and imageries drawn from ordinary life to communicate the meaning of their transforming experiences. For St. Ephrem poetry was the most effective means of proclaiming the truths about God revealed in Jesus Christ. The Fathers of the Church and early theologians found that the mystery of Jesus Christ could be expressed better through various

symbols and metaphors than dogmatic statements. For example, Christ was the tree, the flower, the fire, the milk, the stone, the city, etc. There were also other theriomorphic symbolizations of Christ as the good serpent, as an eagle, as a calf, as a lamb etc. The most important among the symbols of Christ were the lamb and the fish. It needs a contemplative and poetic mind to see everything in this world as a 'Christophany', as Panikkar calls it.

This issue of *Jeevadhara* presents a rich variety of poetic expressions about Jesus Christ in Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Sanskrit languages. Another issue of *Jeevadhara* would present Christ in the poetry in various other languages of India.

The year 2007 marks the centenary of the death of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, the father of Indian Christian theology. In this context it is appropriate to reflect on two of his canticles written in Sanskrit on the Blessed Trinity and Jesus Christ, '*Vande Saccidanandam*,' and 'the Incarnate Logos'. Through these canticles B. Upadhyay shows how the meaning of Jesus Christ can be communicated in a way different from the traditional way of proclamation by presenting Jesus Christ as the *Cit* of *Nirguna Brahman* and as *Nara-Hari*, the unique incarnation.

*Thembavani*, the best known poetic work of Constantine Joseph Beschi in Tamil, depicts the life and mission of Jesus in the context of the narration of his life of Joseph, the foster father of Jesus. The poet draws freely from the Saivite and Vaishnavite traditions certain imageries and understandings of salvation which according to him can easily explain the Christian experience of salvation offered in Jesus Christ meaningfully in the Tamil context. V.M. Gnanapragasm of Maduarai Kamaraj Universtiy who has done extensive research on the works of Beschi introduces this epic to the readers and shows how Beschi makes an appealing presentation of the person and mission of Jesus using the imageries drawn from the religious culture of the people of Tamilnadu.

The poetic narrations about Jesus Christ in Telugu in the past were influenced by *bhakti* traditions and in the present by the

challenges of the social situation, especially of the struggles of the dominated castes or dalits. Among many Telugu Christian poets P.R. John introduces the contributions of four representative poets. In the poems of two Hindu converts Mangalagiri Anandakya Kavi and Purushottam Choudhari and in the hymns of Gurram Jashuva and Dusi Devaraj one discovers how the inexhaustible mystery of Christ finds expression in the struggle of humans searching for meaning for their lives in their socio-cultural and religious context.

The Kristapurana, an Epic in Marathi language, written by Thomas Stephens (1549 – 1619) responded to the question of presenting Jesus Christ and his message meaningfully to those who follow Hindu religious traditions. Nelson Falcao while introducing both the poet and his work affirms that Kristpurana is relevant for the Church as it marches forward in the new millennium because it shows how Christian-Hindu encounter can be mutually enriching and correcting. If Jesus' story is to be told in a way that can appeal to the heart and mind of hearers it could be narrated through the genre of Purana as Stephens had done.

This issue of *Jeevadhara* is dedicated to Fr Joseph Constantine Manalel, the founder and the Chief Editor of *Jeevadhara*, on the occasion of his *Navati* (90<sup>th</sup> Birthday). Committed to his vision of an Indian Church and an Indian theology, rooted in Christian faith, lived in the Indian context and communicated through Indian languages, cultures and thought patterns, he promoted theological reflections and discussions through the publication of *Jeevadhara* in 1971 and by the founding of the Indian Theological Association (ITA) in 1976. Many who share his vision for the Indian Church have joined him in his dreams for a Church that can be transformed by the Indian context and culture and for the transformation of the Indian society in collaboration with all humans of good will irrespective of their religious or ideological affiliations. Fr. Constantine has thus been really a movement. To honour him we have included two articles, "Joseph Constantine Manalel: His Contributions towards the Development of

Indian Theology” by K.T. Sebastian and “Joseph Constantine Manalel: His Vision and Mission” by Sunny Maniyakupara. These two articles are taken from the book, *Indian Theology Seeking New Horizons*, edited by Kuncheria Pathil and Mathew Paikada and published by St. Pauls, Mumbai. We are grateful to St. Pauls for their permission to include these articles in this issue of *Jeevadhara*. We wish Fr. Joseph Constantine Manalel many more fruitful years in the service of the Lord and his people!

Jacob Parappally

# Christ in Brahmabandhab Upadhyay's Sanskrit Canticles

Jacob Parappally

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907) is considered to be the father of Indian Christian Theology. He was a self-proclaimed 'Hindu-Catholic', a Christian Sannyasi, a freedom-fighter, an educationist, a prolific writer and editor of seven journals which he had started. His deep knowledge of the culture and the philosophical thought of Hinduism and his experience of Christ, his deep knowledge of Christian doctrine, theology of the Fathers and scholastic philosophy equipped him well to understand and articulate the significance of Christ in the Indian context. In the two best known canticles, written in honour of the Blessed Trinity, *Vande Saccidanandam*, and the Incarnate Logos he shows how the meaning of Jesus Christ can be communicated in a way different from the traditional way of proclamation by presenting Jesus Christ as the *Cit of Nirguna Brahman* and as *Nara-Hari*, the unique incarnation.

Babhanicharan Banerjee, who took the name Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, translating his baptismal name Theophilos, is considered to be the father of Indian Christian Theology. Born in 1861 in Kannyan, a village, 30 miles north of Kolkotta, B. Upadhyay was a contemporary of Rabindranath Tagore, Keshub Chunder Sen, Pratapchandra Majumdar, Annie Besant, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekandanda, Aurobindo Ghose and many others who were involved both in the spiritual rejuvenation of the Indian society and in the nationalist movement for the total liberation of India from foreign rule. He lived only for 46 years. By the time he died in 1907 due to an infection after a minor operation calling out his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, using his favorite invocation "Thakur,

Thakur” he had outlined his vision of an inculturated Indian Church and an Indian Christian Theology. In his short biographical sketch of B. Upadhyay as an introduction to *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, Vol. I, edited by Julius Lipner and George Gispert-Sauch, Lipner observes: “Upadhyay is one of the enigmas of modern India,... a potential embarrassment to those who invoke him. Religious reformer and religious revivalist, a self confessed ‘Hindu-Catholic’, political activist and social commentator, he is also difficult to be categorised neatly. Perhaps for these reasons there has been a tendency to relegate him to the shadows of modern Indian history or to interpret him in a procrustean fashion. Rabindhranath Tagore, his one-time friend and collaborator, captured something of his elusiveness when he described him thus: ‘He was a Roman Catholic ascetic, yet a vedantin – spirited, fearless, self-denying, erudite and uncommonly influential’”<sup>1</sup>

B. Upadhyay was both a mystic and a prophet. As a mystic he savored the sweetness of the Truth that he experienced as encompassing him and as a prophet he suffered the consequences of his standing for all what he believed to be true. His deep knowledge of the culture and the philosophical thought of Hinduism and his experience of Christ, his deep knowledge of Christian doctrine, theology of the Fathers and scholastic philosophy equipped him well to understand and articulate the significance of Christ in the Indian context. He was a prophet who loved and defended the Church yet disowned by it, a mystic who transcended the boundaries of both his inherited Hindu religious tradition and gifted Christian religious tradition yet misunderstood by the votaries of both, a nationalist committed to the liberation of his country yet whose sincerity to the cause was suspected by his compatriots because of his Christian faith.

This year 2007, on the hundredth death anniversary of B. Upadhyay, the Church in India remembers with gratitude this illustrious son of the Church whose vision and dreams for a Church that is truly Indian and truly Catholic, in its worship, theology, structures and social

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1 J.Lipner, G.Gispert-Sauch, *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, Vol.I (Bangalore: The United Theological College Publ., 1991), p. xv

commitment.<sup>2</sup> Most of his vision found expression in the second Vatican Council especially in the Church's relation with other religions and cultures, liturgical renewal and in the self-understanding of the Church. B. Upadhyay was convinced of the possibility of proclaiming Christ in India by entering into dialogue with the religio-philosophical systems of Hindu religious tradition. But as a theologian committed to his Christian faith he was not prepared to make any compromise with those Hindu doctrines which he found incompatible with traditional Christian doctrines. Remaining faithful to his Christian faith B. Upadhyay attempted to express this deposit of faith handed over by the apostles using Indian categories of thought and expressions that it can 'grow, blossom and fructify till the end of time'<sup>3</sup>. He believed that it was possible to explicate fundamental Christian faith affirmations using Vedantic categories of thought as Aquinas used Aristotelian philosophy to explicate the Christian doctrines. He writes, "attempts must be made to win over Hindu philosophy to the service of Christianity as Greek philosophy was won over in the middle ages."<sup>4</sup> According to him, "Indian soil is humid and its humidity will make the ever new Christian Revelation put forth new harmonies and newer

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- 2 During the centenary year of the death of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (2007) Indian Theological Association (ITA) reflected on the contributions of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay to the Indian Church and Theology during its recently concluded Annual Seminar (21-25 April) on the theme, "Challenge to Theologizing in India Today: Significance of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay". Vidyajyoti College of Theology organized a conference on Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (22<sup>nd</sup> January) and the Diocese of Varanasi has planned programmes to honour Brahmabandhab during the centenary year of his death, 2007.
- 3 *Sophia- Monthly*, July 1987, *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, Vol I, edited and annotated by J.Lipner and G. Gispert-Sacuh (Bangalore: United Theological College Publ., 1991) p.20. Henceforth, referred to as BU I and *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, Vol II, edited and annotated by J.Lipner and G. Gispert-Sacuh (Bangalore: UTC Publ., 2002) henceforth referred to as BU II
- 4 BU I, p.20.

beauties, revealing more clearly the inviolable integrity of the Universal Faith deposited in the Church by the Apostles of Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup> He affirms that the religion of Christ is *supernatural* and the truths in Hinduism are of pure reason illuminated by in the order of nature by the light of the Holy Spirit. “But though the religion of Christ is beyond the grasp of nature and reason, still its foundation rests upon the truths of nature and reason. Destroy the religion of nature and reason, you destroy the supernatural religion of Christ.”<sup>6</sup> Hence for a meaningful proclamation of Christ and Christian doctrine one needs to study and research to find out the truths of Hinduism. B. Upadhyay’s Christological reflections take seriously the Theistic truths contained in Hindu Scriptures and Vedantic categories of thought.

One of the objectives of the journal *Harmony* he founded and edited, was ‘to preach Christ as the Eternal Son of God, as the Logos in all prophets and saints before and after His incarnation and as the incarnate perfect righteousness by whose obedience man is made righteous’<sup>7</sup>. In *Harmony* as well as in his other journal like *Sophia* and *Twentieth Century* he expounded the Christian doctrines on Creation, Trinity, Christology, Grace etc. B. Upadhyay’s canticles on Trinity and Logos written in Sanskrit and translated by him into English express his deep insight into the Christian doctrine of Trinity and Christ and his ability to communicate his experience using poetic imageries and thoughts born in the Indian soil and grown in his fertile mind.

### **I. Christ in the Canticle on Trinity, *Vande Saccidanandam***

This canticle adoring the Trinity is the best known of B. Upadhyay’s hymns in Sanskrit. Introducing the canticle to the readers of the monthly *Sophia* Upadhyay says, “The Sanskrit canticle is an adoration of that ancient *Parabrahman*, the Supreme Being, whose eternal acts finds, according to Catholic faith, an adequate resultant within his

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5 Ibid., p.19

6 *Sophia- Monthly*, January 1895, BU I, p.6

7 *Harmony*, 1890, BU I, p. 2

own Self, who is not obliged to come in contact with the finite beings for the sustenance and satisfaction of his nature. His knowledge is fully satisfied by the cognition of the Logos, the infinite Image of his being, begotten by thought and mirrored in the ocean of his substance. His love finds the fullest satisfaction in the boundless complacency with which he reposes on his Image and breathes forth the Spirit of bliss. The canticle sings of the Father-God (*Parabrahman*), the Logos-God (*Sabda-Brahman*), and the Spirit-God (*Svasita-Brahman*), One in Three, Three in One."<sup>8</sup>

I adore:

The *Sat* (Being), *Cit* (Intelligence) and *Ananda* (Bliss):

The highest goal, which is despised by worldlings, which is desired by *yogis* (devotees).

The Supreme, ancient, higher than the highest, full, indivisible, transcendent and immanent.

One having triple interior relationship, holy, unrelated, self-conscious, hard to realise.

The Father, Begetter, the highest Lord, unbegotten, the rootless principle of the tree of existence.

The cause of the universe, one who creates intelligently, the preserver of the world.

The increate, infinite Logos or Word, supremely great.

The image of the Father, one whose form is intelligence, the giver of highest freedom.

One who proceeds from the union of *Sat* and *Cit*, the blessed Spirit (breath), intense bliss.

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8 *Sophia- Monthly*, October 1898, *The Writings of Brahmagabdhah Upadhyay*, Vol I, edited and annotated by J.Lipner and G. Gispert-Sacuh (Bangalore: United Theological College Publ., 1991) p.126. Henceforth, referred to as BU I and *The Writings of Brahmagabdhah Upadhyay*, Vol II, edited and annotated by J.Lipner and G. Gispert-Sacuh (Bangalore: UTC Publ., 2002) henceforth referred to as BU II

The sanctifier, one whose movements are swift, one who speaks of the Word, the life-giver.<sup>9</sup>

According to B. Upadhyay the Brahman of whom the Vedantists speak is the same as the *esse per se* of Thomistic natural theology. The highest conception of God in the vedantic thinking is *Nirguna* Brahman, the 'attributeless' Absolute. This description of the Godhead finds its real and fuller meaning in the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity. However, the personalistic understanding of Brahman as Absolute with attributes (*Saguna Brahman*) by the theistic schools, is according to the non-theistic schools to be on a lower level than the supra personalistic understanding of Brahman. But the revelation in Christ is that of the Supreme God who cannot be relegated to the lower level, even if this idea of the Absolute contains attributes, which would contribute the Christian concept of God as Person. Moreover it would then admit that the concept of God in the natural order is higher than the concept of God in the supernatural order. The Brahman of Vedanta, although the highest point of Upanishadic thinking, is not the abstract absolute Being of the rationalists.<sup>10</sup> He is absolutely perfect Being, self-sufficient in Himself, but He can be approached not only by the spiritually elite but by everyone. Some argue, however, that the Infinite can be approached only by the spiritually advanced and others must be satisfied with worshipping the finite till they advance to the spiritual level of the enlightened. B. Upadhyaya asks: "Is the Infinite really unapproachable? If it had been so, Reason would be anomaly. The perception of the Infinite is the dawn of Reason."<sup>11</sup>

The *Nirguna Brahman*, the attributeless Absolute is also described in the Vedanta as *Saccidananda*. B. Upadhyay interprets this description of the Brahman as the point of departure for his exposition of Christology from the doctrine of the Trinity, which he explains at

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9 BU I, pp.126-127.

10 See *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, (Delhi: ISPCK, First Published 1969, Revised Edition 1975, Reprinted 2004), pp. 69-74.

11 Animananda, *The Blade: Life and Work of Brahmabandhav Upadhyay* (Calcutta: Roy and Son, n.d.), p.101

first by using these vedantic categories. As the one who is 'unrelated' without, "*Brahman* is Being itself. He alone is identical with His own Being while creatures have no right of being, but have a merely participated and dependent existence".<sup>12</sup> But within himself he may be related as Being (*Sat*), Consciousness (*Cit*) and Bliss (*Ananda*). This communion 'within' the Trinity can be explained when *Cit* is understood as the self-knowledge of God, which is 'eternally generated' because God (*Sat*) is eternally in his self-cognition and so eternally proceeds Bliss (*Ananda*), from this colloquy of *Sat* and *Cit*. B. Upadhyay explains:

The differentiation of the Divine Self as subject and object can be served by no other medium than the Undivided, Infinite Substance which is Pure Knowledge.... It is knowledge and nothing but knowledge which can distinguish the Knowing Self of God from His Known Self. Jesus Christ has told us that there is a response of knowledge in the Godhead. God knows His own Self-begotten in Thought and is known, in return, by that Begotten Self. God reproduces in knowledge a corresponding, acknowledging Self-Image, and from this colloquy of Reason proceeds His Spirit of Love which sweetens the Divine Bosom with boundless delight<sup>13</sup>

According to this description of the doctrine of Trinity by Upadhyay, Jesus Christ is 'God's own Known Self or 'God's own self begotten in Thought' or the 'Acknowledging Self-Image'. Thus He is the *Cit* or Logos of the Father. Through this description, he tries to explain to his countrymen that the God whom the Christians worship is the Supreme *Brahman* or *Saccidananda*, and Jesus Christ is this Supreme God because he is the incarnation of the *Cit* of God. This hymn describes the Father as the "Sun, Supreme Lord, Unborn, the seedless Seed of the tree of becoming, the Cause of all, Creator, Providence and the Lord of the Universe", Jesus Christ is "the infinite

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12 B. Upadhyay, "The True Doctrine of Maya", in: *Sophia-Monthly*, February 1899, BUI, pp.213-217.

13 B. Upadhyay, "Christ's Claim to Attention", in: *The Twentieth Century*, 1901. BU I, pp. 191-195.

and perfect Word, the Supreme Person begotten, sharing the Father's nature, Conscious by essence, Giver of true salvation". The Holy Spirit is the one who proceeds from Sat (Being) and Cit (Consciousness), "replete with the breath of perfect bliss, the Purifier, the Swift, the Revealer of the Word, the Life-giver". The ingenuity of the theological method of B. Upadhyay lies in the fact that he uses Hindu philosophico-religious terminologies with necessary distinctions to express the basic Christian doctrines. He avoids the Greek and Latin expressions, which are not only loaded with their own history of development but also unintelligible in the Indian context. While avoiding the heresies of modalism and tritheism, which any explanation of mystery of the Trinity can fall into when translated into Indian languages, his approach expresses meaningfully the orthodox Christian belief in the vedantic categories.

B. Upadhyay attempts to show that Jesus Christ, the *Cit*, is also the Supreme Lord, and not a mere aspect or 'mode' of the Supreme *Brahman* as Keshub Chunder Sen thought him to be, although Sen considered Christ to be the Wisdom of God. B. Upadhyay holds that this Divine Wisdom, this *Cit* of the *Saccidananda Brahman*, this *Sophia*, is none other than the Incarnate Logos, Jesus Christ. For he says, "*Sophia*, according to the Catholic Faith, is more than an aspect of the Godhead. It is the Word of God, the Son, who became man for our sake and died for us on the Cross"<sup>14</sup>.

In his brilliant analysis of the form and the content of the hymn, *Vande Saccidanandam*, G. Gispert-Sauch observes that few people, perhaps, realize the richness of its content and the beauty of its expression. According to him, "It is a gem of Christian hymnology, and probably the best example of a deep adaptation of the Christian faith to the cultural patterns of Indian religious thought. This hymn is an outburst of praise to the Holy Trinity, the core of Christian revelation, and continues the twenty-centuries- old meditation of the Church on

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14 Animananda, *op.cit.*, p.121

this mystery....It expresses this faith mostly in words and expressions that emerge from the religious consciousness of India."<sup>15</sup>

## 2. Hymn to the Incarnate Logos

The traditional Catholic understanding of the Person and function of Jesus Christ is also very clear in his hymn to the Incarnate Logos<sup>16</sup> where he explains the mystery of incarnation using the Indian categories of thought. Employing Indian terminologies he tries to answer the basic Christological question – Who is Jesus Christ? And the soteriological question – How does Jesus Christ bring about salvation for humankind? In this hymn one could easily detect a systematic development of the theme of the Person and function of Jesus Christ. According to him Jesus Christ is:

The transcendent Image of Brahman  
 Blossomed and mirrored in the full-to-overflowing (*upacita*)  
 Eternal Knowledge (*ciracit*) – Victory to God, the God-Man.  
 Child of the golden (pure) Virgin,  
 Director of the Universe, absolute,  
 Yet charming with relations, Victory to God, the God-Man.  
 Ornament of the assembly of the learned  
 Destroyer of fear,  
 Chastiser of the Spirit of wickedness: Victory to God, the God-Man.  
 Dispeller of spiritual and physical infirmities  
 Ministering unto others,  
 One whose actions and doings are sanctifying:

15 G.Gispert-Sauch, "The Sanskrit Hymns of Brahmagabdhav Upadhyay," *Religion and Society*, 19/4 (1972), p. 60

16 B. Upadhyay, "The Incarnate Logos" in: *The Twentieth Century*, Jan. 1901, BU I, p.191. For another translation of this hymn, see C.F. Andrews, *Renaissance in India*, London, 1912. Appendix VIII, also cited in R. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, (Delhi: ISPCK, First Published 1969, Revised Edition 1975, Reprinted 2004), p.77.

Victory to God, the God-Man.

One who has offered up his agony, whose life is sacrifice,

Destroyer of the poison of sin: Victory to God, the God-Man.

Tender, beloved, charmer of the heart,

(soothing) pigment of the eye, crusher of fierce death: Victory to God, the God-Man.

Though in this hymn B. Upadhyay uses Indian terminologies which have their own religious and philosophical underpinnings he would not compromise the content of the Catholic belief in the Incarnate Logos, who is the second person of the Blessed Trinity and truly human and truly divine. His attempt is to provide a deeper understanding of the meaning of these mysteries for his countrymen.

#### *a. Jesus Christ, the Transcendent Image of Brahman*

The pre-existent Christ is the transcendent image of *Brahman*. The Christian faith affirms that all humans are created in the image and likeness of God. What distinguishes the Logos, the eternal Son of God from other humans is that he is *the transcendent image* of God. And at the same time as Incarnate Logos he is the image of God like any other humans. This is what identifies him with every other human being. One cannot but recognize Upadhyay's allusion to the Pauline way of describing Jesus Christ as the *image of the Invisible God* (*eikon, imago Dei*, Col 1: 15) and to the affirmation of the Letter to the Hebrews that Jesus Christ is 'the exact imprint of God's very being (*charakter, figura substantiae*, Heb 1:3). Familiar with the writings of the Fathers, Upadhyay seems to have been influenced by the Christology of Ignatius of Antioch (d. C.E. 110) who explained who Jesus Christ is using paradoxes. For Ignatius, "there is one Physician, who is both flesh (*sarkikos*) and spirit (*pneumatikos*), born and not born, who is God and yet human, immortal and yet mortal, both of Mary and from God, able to suffer yet impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord"<sup>17</sup> For Upadhyay Jesus Christ is the transcendent image of *Nirguna Brahman*, yet he is born of the 'pure Virgin'. As the image of the *Nirguna Brahman*, the Unrelated

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17 Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 7:2.

Absolute, and yet he is 'charming with relations', 'tender, beloved, charmer of the heart'. Here again, B. Upadhyay seems to emphasize that it is not the personal aspect of God (*Saguna Brahman*) that was born of the Virgin but the absolute *Cit* of the *Nirguna Brahman*, the Godhead. Jesus Christ offered up himself as a sacrifice in agony and yet destroyer of death.

The soteriological function of Christ, the transcendent image of Brahman, flows from his person as he is the 'destroyer of fear', 'chastiser of the spirit of wickedness' 'dispeller of spiritual and physical infirmities' 'minister of others', sanctifier, 'tender, beloved, charmer of the heart, soothing ointment of the eye', self-sacrificer, 'destroyer of the poison of sin' and the 'crusher of fierce death'. All these titles of Jesus and his various soteriological functions have their source in the Bible and some of them also seem to have been influenced by similar images in Hindu religious tradition. The streams of both Hindu and Christian religious traditions welling up within him probably made him capable of using imageries and expressions which could touch the hearts of his readers and evoke in them a new and deeper understanding of the person Jesus Christ. When Jesus is presented as a 'destroyer of fear' it reminds a person who is familiar with the New Testament of Jesus' constant exhortation to his disciples and all those who followed him, "Do not be afraid" or "Fear not!" (Mt 10:28,31; 14:27; 17:7; 28:5,10; Mk 5:36; Lk 12:7; Jn 6:20 etc.), because fear paralyses humans' minds and hearts that they would not be able to unfold themselves and become truly human as they are called to become. So Paul reminds the believers that they 'did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into *fear*' but they have received a spirit of adoption by which they can call God, "Abba" (cfr. Rom 8:15). Jesus Christ, 'destroyer of fear' makes it possible for humans to experience in the Spirit the true freedom from fear and to live in the security of love of the Father offered in Jesus Christ. The title 'the chastiser of the spirit of wickedness' makes Jesus different from the *avatars* of Vaishnavite tradition of Hinduism. The purpose of the repeated incarnations of Vishnu is to destroy the wicked and

re-establish *dharma* or the cosmic order is clearly stated in the *Bhagvad Gita*.<sup>18</sup> While explaining both the gravity of sin which is 'insult to the infinite dignity' of God and God's infinite love for the sinner Upadhyay says, "Sin is awful in its consequences. Rouse yourself up, if you are in sin, to do penance. Invoke the bountiful mercy of God and he will show you how he saves a sinner by his bounty which satisfies infinite Justice and yet remains a bounty."<sup>19</sup> Writing on the doctrine of original sin, he says, "But as sad is the history of the fall of our first parents, and melancholy as are its consequences upon us their descendents, it has become the occasion for the noblest manifestation of the mercy of God, in the person Jesus Christ the Redeemer".<sup>20</sup>

Jesus is the 'dispeller of spiritual and physical infirmities' because during his life on earth Jesus healed people of the their spiritual, psychological and physical sicknesses. He brings wholeness to persons and societies as his manifesto at Nazareth claims (Lk 4: 18f). He was a 'man for others', by 'ministering unto others' with an attitude of self-emptying love and self-forgetting service. His servanthood found expression in the washing of the feet of his disciples. As the suffering servant of Yahweh he 'has borne our infirmities,... he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities...making his life an offering for sin' (Cfr. Is 53: 4 – 5, 10b). Letter to the Hebrews presents Jesus as the High priest who offers the sacrifice of his own life as 'he entered once and for all into the Holy Place not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption' (Heb 9: 12) Thus 'his actions and doings are sanctifying' as Upadhyay's hymn affirms because "the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have one Father (Heb 2:11). Jesus is also 'the destroyer of the poison of sin'. Here one can detect a probable allusion to a narrative in the Saivite tradition which speaks of Siva swallowing the poison that came out from the churning of

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18 Bhagvadgita, IV, 7. 8.

19 Bhagvadgita, IV, 7. 8.

20 *Sophia-Monthly*, January, 1897, BU I, p. 280

the ocean of milk in order to save everyone from annihilation.<sup>21</sup> Following the *bhakti* tradition which emerged from a deep, personal, intimate relationship of the *bhakta* or devotee to his or her Lord as that of a lover to the beloved, Upadhyay presents Jesus as tender, beloved and the charmer of the heart like Krishna who is often presented in the Puranas as the charmer of the hearts of all, humans, animals and birds. Thus, in this hymn to the Incarnate Logos we find a fine blending of imageries from the Christian and Hindu traditions to highlight the truths revealed through the mystery of Christ-event.

***b. Jesus Christ, the Nara-Hari, God-Man***

In the refrain referring to the incarnate Logos, Upadhyay uses the term *Nara-Hari* (Man-God) for Jesus Christ. Probably by using this term *Nara-Hari* he wants to express the unity of the two natures, the human and the divine, in One person. *Hari*, though a synonym for God in common Hindu parlance, has Vaishnavite sectarian overtones. Some Christians may not be happy with this use of the term *Hari* (God), in relation with *Nara* (Man) to express the two natures in Jesus Christ because *Hari* is a proper name for *Vishnu*, the absolute personal God in the Vaishnava religious sect of Hinduism. But in the context of B. Upadhyay's reflection on Christology with his selective use of Indian categories and his interpretation of them to express the content of Christian faith, we can conclude with certainty that he uses the term *Hari* as a synonym for God to evoke a loving devotion to Jesus Christ, the *Nara-Hari* rather than to evoke any theological controversies.

Upadhyay does not seem to use the term *Nara-Hari* for the sake of any novelty. For him this term would express the hypostatic union of two natures in Jesus Christ. Faithful to the Christological formula of the council of Chalcedon, he tries to explain how we can understand the one Person of Jesus Christ as having two natures, both divine and human. He uses the Indian philosophico-anthropological categories to explain this mystery of hypostatic union. In his journal *The Twentieth Century*, he writes:

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21 *Sophia-Monthly*, April, 1897, BU I, p.283

According to Vedanta, human nature is composed of five sheaths or divisions (*kosa*). These sheaths are: (1) physical (*annamaya*); (2) vital (*pranamaya*); (3) mental (*manomaya*); (4) intellectual (*vijnanamaya*); (5) spiritual (*anandamaya*). These five sheaths are presided over by a personality (*ahampratyayi*), which knows itself. This self-knowing individual (*jiva-chaitanya*) is but a reflected spark of the Supreme Reason (*kutastha-caitanya*) who abides in every man as the prime source of life and light.<sup>22</sup>

This understanding of the nature of humans with five sheaths, is typically Indian,<sup>23</sup> B. Upadhyay tries to explain the hypostatic union of divine and human natures in Jesus Christ the God-Man using this understanding of the composition of humans:

The time-incarnate Divinity is also composed of five sheaths: but it is presided over by the Person of Logos Himself and not by any created personality (*aham*). The five sheaths and the individual agent, enlivened and illumined by Divine Reason... make up man. But in the God-man the five sheaths are acted upon directly by the Logos-God and not through the medium of any individuality.<sup>24</sup>

Some detect in this explanation of the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ a certain closeness to Apollinarianism,<sup>25</sup> which taught that the divinization of the flesh of Christ was so total that the Saviour was not a real man and had no higher soul and therefore 'appeared as a man'. It denied Christ the presence of a human free-will and normal human psychological development.<sup>26</sup> But in B. Upadhyay's explanation of the hypostatic union using the Indian philosophico-anthropological categories, the

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22 See Beschi's use of this imagery of the poison of sin in *Thembavani* referring to the saving action of Siva, in the article of V.M.Gnanapragasam in this issue of Jeevadhara.

23 B. Upadhyay, "Incarnate Logos" BUI, p. 191,

24 See J. Mattam, "Interpreting Christ in India Today: The Calcutta School", in: *IJT* 23 (1974), p.196.

25 B. Upadhyay, "The Incarnate Logos", BU I, p.191.

26 See R. Boyd, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

human intellectual and volitional faculties in Jesus are not replaced by the Logos-God or eternal *Cit*, and therefore Jesus remains one like us. The difference between him and us is that in Jesus Christ his humanity is united with the Logos-God as he is, and we have in us only the general presence of him as the 'prime source of life and light'. So in his humanity, he is like us although in his divinity he is essentially different from us, because "Jesus Christ is God by the necessity of His being, but He became human of His own free choice. It was compassion for us, which made Him our Brother, like us in sorrow and suffering but without sin. Jesus Christ is perfectly Divine and perfectly human. He is the incarnate Logos".<sup>27</sup> B. Upadhyay conveys the meaning of hypostatic union without doing violence to the understanding of human nature and divine nature in the one person of Jesus Christ.

### c. *Jesus Christ, the Unique Incarnation of God*

The Hindu theistic traditions, especially Vaishnavism, believe in the 'descent' or *avatara* of God Vishnu in human form from time to time "for the protection of good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of the law".<sup>28</sup> According to these traditions, there is a multiplicity of *Avataras*: prominent among them are Rama and Krishna. They are the incarnations of Vishnu who himself is believed to be the manifestation of *Brahman*. In this context of Hindu belief in *Avataras*, B. Upadhyay is totally opposed to the idea of considering Jesus Christ as an *Avatara* not only because it removes the uniqueness of the incarnation of *Brahman* as Jesus Christ but also because it undermines the Christian doctrine of Atonement. So from the christological and soteriological point of view, according to B. Upadhyay, one cannot substitute the doctrine of the unique incarnation of God in Jesus Christ with a Christian doctrine of *Avatara*. He is convinced that there is fundamental difference between the doctrines of incarnation and *avatara*, which lies in the basic Christian belief that God became human to redeem humankind from sin and

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27 See. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, V Ed., London, 1989, p. 296.

28 B. Upadhyay, "Incarnate Logos", BU I, p. 190

there is nothing like this in the doctrine of *avatara*.<sup>29</sup> Krishna as an *avatara* of Vishnu cannot be compared to Christ, the unique Incarnation of Brahman, because Krishna and other *Avataras* belong simply to the realm of *maya* or contingent beings. However, the *avatara* doctrine, according to him, can give an insight into the Christian understanding of the God-given capacity of humans to be united with God. He says, "The erroneous Vedantic doctrine of God realising Himself in spiritual heroes and *avatars* (incarnations) illumines in a new way, as far as a mystery can said to be illumined, the transcended Christian belief that man is destined to become perfect like God by union with Him who *real* God and *real* Man, fully realised God-in-Man."<sup>30</sup> Once the uniqueness of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ was safeguarded, B. Upadhyay did not find any difficulty in defending the so called *Avataras* of Hindu traditions as historical personalities or moral teachers or both, probably because he believed that the complete rejection of them would not be in the best interests of the nationalistic movements and of the preservation of the Indian culture which was under the onslaught of the West during the British colonial rule.

The unique incarnation of the Logos is incomparable. This incarnation is "accomplished by uniting humanity with divinity in the person of the Logos. This incarnate God in man we call Jesus Christ. He took flesh from the womb of a spotless, immaculate Virgin for the formation of his body. As the first man (*adi-purusa*) was produced by divine *samkalpa* (will) so was the body of Jesus Christ, whom we hold to be the *adipurusa* of spiritual world, formed by the Spirit of God and not by the usual process of procreation."<sup>31</sup> B. Upadhyay's deep faith in the unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the Logos incarnate, thus find expression in a hymn at the end of his explanation of the meaning of incarnation, probably because he knew that poetic

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29 Bhagvadgita, IV, 7. 8.

30 See J. Lipner. "A case study in 'Hindu Catholicism: Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907)", in *Zeitschrift fuer Missionswissenschaft and Religionswissenschaft (ZMRW)*, 72 (1988), p.49.

31 *Sophia*-Monthly, July, 1987, BU I, p. 18

symbols and metaphors could give a better insight into the mystery of Christ than dogmatic statements.

### **Conclusion**

The Sanskrit hymns of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay express his ability to communicate the sublime truths of Christian faith in a language, idiom and imagery familiar to the educated compatriots of his time. Often an explanation about a Christian doctrine using the Indian categories of thought precedes or follows his canticles. When the systematic reflections on the mystery of Christ-event and the rational explanations about the revealed truths appeal to the intellect of the listeners, the poetic description of the content of faith through metaphors and imageries used in poetry appeal to their hearts and evoke true devotion. B. Upadhyay's both Sanskrit hymns replete with imageries drawn from the Christian and the Hindu traditions express in a powerful way that no one culture, language or philosophical thought can have exclusive claims to communicate the mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Further, it affirms that the inexhaustible mystery of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnate Logos can find new expressions and interpretations leading to a deeper experience of God in Jesus Christ if the mystery is intensely experienced at the personal level, if its expressions inextricably related to the content of the original faith and if its communication is done using the symbols and metaphors and thought patterns of a particular culture.

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# Jesus in Thembavani

V.M. Gnanapragasam

The Tamil epic *Thembavani* written by Constant Joseph Beschi (d.1747) or *Viramamunivar*, a Jesuit missionary, told the story of Jesus to the Tamils in a language appealing to their hearts and challenging their minds. Though the central character of the Epic is St. Joseph, the poet communicates through narration of various events the salvation offered to humans through the Word-incarnate Jesus Christ. The poet draws freely from the Saivite and Vaishnavite traditions certain imageries and understandings of salvation which according to him can easily explain the Christian experience of salvation offered in Jesus Christ meaningfully in the Tamil context.

## The Epic

Thembavani is a Tamil epic on the life and role of St. Joseph, the foster father of JESUS. In pure Tamil he is known as Valan, one who grows (in the grace of God). We hear very little about Joseph in the New Testament. Beschi (Veeramamunivar) the author of this epic, has sung 3615 poems on St. Joseph.

His source, as he says in the preface, was the book 'City of God' written by Sr. Maria d' Agreda, a Spanish nun, who had the privilege of receiving from Our Lady a detailed account of the life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Joseph is the hero, main character in the epic.

## The Times

Robbert de Nobili began inculturation in Tamil Nadu in 17<sup>th</sup> century. He incarnated himself in the language, customs and tradition of the Tamils. Though he had to meet with much opposition, his method was finally approved by the Holy See and continued by St. John de Britto, who was murdered in 1693. Beschi (Veeramamunivar) who

came to TamilNadu in 1711 confirmed the method of De Nobili, extended it into Tamil literature in its different forms: poetry, prose, grammar, dictionary and translation. His poetical and prose works are in tune with Tamil culture and religion of those days. This paper intends to show in particular Beschi's method of inculturation.

### **The Smile of Jesus**

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Mother Mary spoke to him, "Son, the world will give you the sufferings you sought for and you will give it heavenly blessings" (10:118). On hearing this true message, the Infant Jesus smiled. (10:119). Joseph fondles the child with affection and with awe. Jesus smiles and through the smile, joy flowed and filled the earth and heaven. (10:129).

During the Presentation (on the 40<sup>th</sup> day) of Jesus in the temple, the high priest Simeon prophesied that the Infant Jesus would be the cause of the fall and rise of many in Israel, a sign of contradiction. (Lk. 2: 34). On hearing these words, Jesus (the original 'City of God' says) bowed his head. Thembavani says that Jesus while nodding his head, smiled (12:95). God loves a cheerful giver.

While returning from Egypt after seven years, the Holy Family met on a mountain a group of ancient people who had assisted the Maccabean leaders. The women in that group, when they saw the seven year old boy, Jesus, ran up and down and plucked flowers and brought a garland to him. Jesus smiled and said: "Why did you take so much trouble to gather these flowers which will fade in a day" (30:141).

During the same journey Jesus saw Mt. Moria, on which the sacrifice of Isaac took place. He spoke to his parents about his death on a mountain and added that he was anxious to face that day. Then a cross appeared which Jesus held and sang:

"O beauty, my love

This is the wagon of my love

This is the key of the heavenly home" (30:119).

Mary and Joseph were in tears. Jesus smiled and said, "Let us proceed" (30:122).

The smile of Jesus does not appear in the New Testament. In Saivism there is the story of Siva destroying the fortress of three demons, by his very smile. The Italian poet Virgil sings:

“Begin, little boy, to recognize  
the mother with a smile”. (Eclogue 60:64).

It is likely that this smile of an infant may have prompted Beschi to speak of the smile of Jesus, the infant.

### **The Future Predicted**

When in the return journey, the holy Family passed through a desert, the boy Jesus predicts the future condition of the desert that the dry desert would become a fountain of honey and be like heaven (30:63). The reason is the ascetical lives of hermits like Paul, Antony, Hilary, Mary of Egypt and others.

Once the humble Joseph offered his apology to Jesus saying that he (Joseph) had risen high because of his association with Jesus, whereas Jesus, because of his association with Joseph, had to come down low: for instance Jesus had to live in a poor house. Jesus then consoled Joseph saying that what is humble would be exalted. As an instance, Jesus foretells the future of this poor house which will be later on transferred by angels to Italy and become a shrine attracting pilgrims (32:26-29).

While speaking of this shrine in Italy, Beschi, the Italian, speaks of the glory of Italy in four stanzas (32: 22-25). He foretells that the Christian life would flourish through the grace obtained in the seven sacraments and the just reign of Christian kings like Davian, Achiam, Silaciyam and others (32: 72-89). In places like this we see the Western stream flowing.

### **At the Age of Twelve**

As soon as Jesus, (a boy of twelve) saw the temple of Jerusalem, he was reminded of the dream of Jacob at Bethel and said, “I am the ladder (connecting heaven and earth): my cross is this ladder. How can I be happy or restful before I embrace my cross. Here we see the idea of Jesus as recorded in Luke 12:50.

According to Luke, Joseph and Mary inquired about Jesus from their relatives and acquaintances (Lk 2: 44). Beschi, following the

original (City of God) says that Joseph went out looking for Jesus in the portion of hills and mountains and Mary was searching in the streets of Jerusalem. She met a woman, who, after hearing from Mary about the appearance of Jesus, said "A boy of that description came one day to me asking for alms. But in Thembavani; Jesus asks for food from that woman she gave him food, but could not forget his face (31:75).

With regard to the presence of Jesus in the Assembly of rabbis, Luke says that he was listening to them and asking them questions (Lk 2: 46). The City of God mentions some questions of Jesus:

Has the Messiah come? What about the news that spread twelve years back that shepherds went to see the Messiah and that three wise men from the East came to see the Messiah. Similar questions put by Jesus in Thembavani.

In the original (City of God) the question asked by the Rabbis, "Who are you?" did not have any answer. In Thembavani Jesus gives an enigmatic answer:

"If I have father, I have no mother;

If I have mother, I have no father;

I belong to two races,

Without defiling any race" (31:93).

At the beginning of this chapter in which the parents of Jesus could not trace the foot steps of Jesus, Beschi refers to the example of the sailing of the ship and of the flying of the bird in the air, leaving no trace behind, an example taken from the Book of Wisdom of Solomon, (5:10).

### **The Resurrection of Jesus**

After the death of Jesus, his soul, as we say in the creed, descended into the Limbo and rose on the third day. Thembavani, following City of God, gives a detailed account of how the soul of Jesus went to the Limbo, gathered the saints and the souls in purgatory, took them to the sepulcher to make them look at his body that had paid the price of their redemption. To give one example, Jesus says that his body was scourged 5115 times (35:47).

Then he made the saints rise with him (as we read in Matthew 27:52). Thembavani following the original says that one of them was Joseph. Jesus and this company of saints including St. Joseph went to visit Mother Mary. Mary saw them, fell at their feet and immediately all her sorrow left her (35:82).

### **Inculturation**

When speaking about the poor life and suffering of Jesus, through which all get forgiveness of sin and access to heaven, Beschi makes a reference to the Saivite tradition of the Milky ocean. According to it: the devas who were churning the ocean obtained cintamani and ambrosia which they look for themselves, but later when poison came up, they rushed to Siva who took it for himself. Hence he is known as Thirunila Kandan. This idea that God takes to himself what is bitter and gives to others what is sweet is an important doctrine of Saivism, which is brought to the notice of people twice a month in the ritual called "pirathosham".

When shepherdesses came to see Jesus in the manger and asked Mary why God comes in this sad way of bitter life, Mary in her answer refers to this idea of Thirunila Kandan.

As a remedy of the poison of sin committed by man, man should take the poison of punishment. It is God who takes on himself the poison of suffering and death in order to give forgiveness and bliss of heaven to all (11:57). And Shanthi an intelligent woman in this group understood this idea and repeated it with a grateful mind.

During the ministry of Joseph in Egypt a person by name Vaman known for his strength in the battlefield and weakness in the moral field came to Joseph for counselling. Referring to his enslavement to the promises of women he remarked that the words of women give forth first ambrosia but later on poison (28: 29).

After seven years of silent life and fruitful service in Egypt, the Holy Family left Egypt at night, without taking leave of the loving people. When the people heard of their departure they felt its bitterness and remarked. "Your presence gave us ambrosia, your departure poison" (30: 14).

When the holy family goes to Jerusalem for the Presentation of Jesus, they pass through, as in Tamil literary tradition, Kurinchi (portion

of mountain), Mullai (portion of the forest) and Marutham (portion of fields). In the portion of mullai the calves which were returning home with their mother cows, saw Infant Jesus in the hands of Mary and leaving their mothers began to follow Jesus. This echoes the idea in Vaisnavisam that Kannan's flute performance attracted animals, and the Saivite tradition that Saint Anayanar used to attract animals and birds by his flute.

### **In conclusion**

Thembavani, as Xavier S. Thaninayagam, a well-known Tamil scholar, used to say, is a lake in which the foreign and native rivers mingle sweetly.

The presentation of Jesus is in accordance with the Bible tradition and Indian (Tamil) tradition. As a result, one can say that Christianity in Thembavani is a tree that has taken root in Indian culture: the incarnation of Christ in Tamil language and culture is undeniable. Thus is fulfilled the exhortation of Vatican II which wants us to acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral good found in other religions.<sup>1</sup>

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1 . Nostra aetate, No.2

# Christ in Telugu Poetry

P. R. John

Influenced by the bhakti tradition of pouring out the deep felt devotion of the devotee to his/her *ishtadevata* (favorite deity) in poetry the Krist bhaktas expressed their experience of Jesus Christ and their devotion to him in Telugu Christian poetry since 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the poems of two Hindu converts Mangalagiri Anandakya Kavi and Purushottam Choudhari and in the hymns of Gurram Jashuva and Dusi Devaraj one discovers how the inexhaustible mystery of Christ finds expression in the struggle of humans searching for meaning in their socio-cultural and religious context. When Anandakya Kavi explains the salvation history and the Christian doctrines in the context of a seeker asking questions concerning worship of God to attain eternal life, Choudhari presents Jesus Christ as his *Ishtadevata*. Gurram Jashuva presents Jesus, the Dalit, who struggles with those who are searching to restore their dignity as humans with their divine image in a society which devices systems and structures that deny them these basic rights. For Dusi Devaraj, Jesus Christ is just not an ideal to be followed but the Lord to be encountered in the Eucharist.

## Introduction

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Christianity made its presence felt among the Telugu people. The *bhakti* movement was prevalent during this period. The popular Hindu *bhakti* figures of Telugu people were Ksetraya (17<sup>th</sup> century), Ramadas (1620-1680) and Tyagaraja (1767-1847). These men composed rich poetry, popularly known as *kirtanas* (praises) to Lord Vishnu and Lord Rama. Telugu Christians adopted literary methods, available from *bhakti* movement, to express their devotion and attachment to Jesus Christ. As a result, there emerged much Christian poetry, which enriched the Telugu culture and literature. During the same period, Pingali Ellana wrote *Sarvesvara Mahatyam*, popularly known as *Tobhya Caritra*. This was the first Telugu Christian *Kavya* (poetic-story). Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>

century, there came a second *Kavya*, *Vedanta Rasayanam*, by Mangalagiri Anandakya Kavi. *Jnanacintamani* of Mallela Timmaraju and *Anitya Nitya Vyatyasam* followed this work. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Purushottam Choudhari and Pulipaka Jaganatham contributed two works in classical poetry. This trend continued to influence the modern Telugu Christian poetry too. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, modern Telugu poets like Srirangam Srinivas, Karunashri, Sri Dasaradhi and Gurram Jashuva metaphorically portrayed Jesus as *Sangapashuvu* (Community Cow), *Sramaikajivi* (Hard Worker), *Premamurthi* (Embodiment of Love), *Mahajnani* (Enlightened One) and the *Dalit* (Broken One). From 1985, based on the reformation brought out by Vatican II, Dusi Devaraj has composed nearly two hundred hymns on Christian liturgy.

In this short article, first, we would like to look into the experience of a few *bhaktas* (devotees) who encountered Christ in their lives and expressed their *anubhava* (experience) in the form of poems and hymns. Mainly, the focus is on two poets and two hymn writers who emphasized on Jesus Christ: Anandakya Kavi - Christ the way to true religion, Choudhari - Christ the *istadevata*, Jashuva - Christ the *dalit*, and Devaraj - Christ the Eucharist. Secondly, what can we learn from this study?

Mangalagiri Anandakya Kavi - Jesus Christ, the Way to True Religion

Anandakya Kavi regarded as a poet of eminence among Telugu poets. He was a Niyogi Brahmin. He embraced Christianity during the flourishing Carnatic Mission of the Jesuits in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote *Vedantarasayanam* (*Jesus Christ, the Way to True Religion*).<sup>1</sup> It was the first Christological *Kavya* in Telugu literature. He employed indigenous expression through out the *Kavya*. The *Kavya* sub-divided into four cantons in which the dialogue between the Hindu Brahmin and a Jesuit priest is brought out:

**Canto 1:** Parvataya, a Brahmin went to see another Brahmin called Gnanappa who asked which God one had to honour to obtain heaven. As an answer, Parvataya told him the following story. There once lived in the town of Chik-Balapur a famous king, called Havati Baiche and a Jesuit priest named Gnanabodha Muni. One

1 M. Anandakya Kavi, *Vedantarasayanam: A Poem in Four Cantons*, (Nellore: St. John's Press, 1969), 15.

day there arose in the king's council a dispute about an eclipse of the moon. Mallarasu, a very wise Brahmin, said there would be no eclipse, but as the dispute could not be settled, it was resolved to ask, Gnanabodha. He too, declared there would be no eclipse. Mallarasu admired the wisdom of the Gnanabodha and went to see him often. One day Gnanabodha asked him, "You knew all about the *Vedas*, who is true God according to you?" Mallarasu explained the Hindu teaching on gods and goddesses and Gnanabodha took that occasion to enlighten him that there was only one God. Mallarasu asked how he could know the true God and Gnanabodha, using the Thomistic philosophy of his time, helped him to infer God from nature and natural laws.

**Canto II:** Gnanabodha further explains the creation of Adam and Eve, the temptation and their fall, the promise of the Redeemer to Abraham, the history of Zacharias, Annunciation, and birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Christ up to the finding in the temple.

**Canto III:** The preaching of John the Baptist, fast and temptation of Christ, His Baptism, explanation of the Holy Trinity, election of the Apostles, the cure of the blind at Jericho, Lazarus, entry in Jerusalem, the last supper, the agony, Christ before Caiphas and Pilate.

**Canto IV:** Jesus is nailed to the cross and dies, is buried, difference between limbo, hell and purgatory, the resurrection and apparitions, ascension, descent of the Holy Ghost, assumption of the Blessed Virgin, Simon Peter, head of the Church, last judgment, the ten commandments, Baptism and Holy Eucharist.

Anandakya Kavi was concerned with salvific history. According to him, Salvation consisted in embracing a right religion. The way to true religion, was to experience Christ. The Church was a tangible historical body, which facilitated salvation. The gods, goddesses were man made and would not grant salvation. Through out the *Kavya*, he maintained the humans were under sin and needed Christ to save them. He brought out the sinful nature of human beings from Adam's sin. According to him, humans were slaves of Satan, the tormenter, who kept them from acting freely. Satan impeded the human realization of freedom which God had intended. Therefore, the main work of Christ was to strive for victory against the power that held us in subjugation (Satan). Christ achieved it by pouring out his blood on the

cross. In this way, Jesus Christ brought the salvation. Hence, for him, Christ is the way to true religion and it is realized by partaking in the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist.

### **Purushottam Choudhari - Christ the *Istadevata***

Choudhari was a Brahmin born on September 5, 1803 in a village called Madanapur in Ganjam district of today's Orissa. He was the "Father of Telugu Christian Hymns". He spontaneously sang the first Telugu Christian *pata* or *gitam* (hymn or song) in a congregation by Baptist Missionaries at Cuttack. This marked the birth of the Christian hymn in Telugu language. He wrote about 130 hymns, published as *Andhra Kraistava Keerthanalu*. He was praised as the first lyricist of the Telugu Church. His lyrics and other works have become part of the treasured heritage of Andhra Christians.<sup>2</sup> It is said, Choudhari had a deep spiritual longing. He came across written material and while reading it he realized that there was only one God and Jesus as the Son of God. He is the Mediator between God and men. Jesus is the Incarnate One. Jesus being sinless died for sinners. He was buried and ascended to His Father.<sup>3</sup> These words attracted Choudhari so much that he began to read, learn and reflect on the life of Jesus Christ. He went through a long a struggle between Hindu faith and Christian faith. Finally, he removed *jandam* (the sacred thread), of *dwija* (the twice born) and became the disciple of Jesus. We shall have a glimpse of his hymns:

#### **Hymn 1**

Today I have the secret revelation of Jesus Christ,  
 Today my soul has ascended the mountain of Salvation.  
 First of all my sins are found  
 My heart confessed them all,  
 For them my soul felt sorry,  
 The way to leave them is found.  
 My ears heard the teaching of the Gospel,  
 The preaching hitherto heard, left  
 The good Christian fellowship is achieved,  
 Other gods hitherto worshipped are left.

2 R. R. Sundara Rao, *Bhakti Theology in the Telugu Hymnal* (Madras: CISRS, 1983), 9.

3 Cf. R. Joseph, The Christology of an Indian Christian: Purushottam Choudari (1803-90) *BTF* 14,1 (1982): 70.

The secret of the depth of the souls is found  
That was filled with great sins  
Christ has given his life with love  
Through His death, He wiped away all sins.

To treat others as you is itself love  
The mind itself is offered to God  
Grace and peace are achieved  
The soul has found the glory of the heaven.<sup>4</sup>

### *Hymn 2*

Just as I am, coming to thy presence O Savior!  
A bundle of numerous sins has been on my back  
I cannot walk, trembling, look on me with mercy!

With ceaseless love for me  
Thou art an ocean of mercy O my savior!  
Thy blood was shed;  
Thou hast called me to be with thee  
For no reason on my part, Lord.

Pauper, blind, heinous as I am, fallen,  
For the healing of my tired soul,  
For sight of my eyes,  
To receive from thee what I need  
Now I come to thee, my Savior.  
I trusted in thy promise,  
I laid my burden on thee  
And I found the way of life  
Pardon me and receive me by thy grace  
Purify my thoughts, grant me what I need.<sup>5</sup>

### *Hymn 3*

When shall I see Jesus?  
When shall I be in paradise?  
In the midst of the Angels  
Before the throne of the Father.

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4 Cf. D. Babu, *Andhra Kraistava Keerthanalu* (Hyderabad: 1980), 378.

5 *Andhra Kraistava Keerthanalu*, 258.

When shall I be freed from the bondage of the devil?  
When shall I go to the presence of *Sadguru*?

When shall we pass this?  
Ocean of troubles and turmoil?  
When shall we live in the presence?  
Of the great soul with contentment and friendship?

When shall we wear the golden crown and lyre?  
When shall we sing the songs of alleluia?<sup>6</sup>

These hymns portray how Choudhari as *Krista bhakta* has encountered his *istadevata* (favorite deity) Jesus Christ. This encounter brings about total change in his life. He believes that outside the realm of Jesus there is no existence for him. He counts on the unfailing promise of his Lord, that for he who seeks the Kingdom of God, the rest will be available. These hymns also depict the heavily burdened soul of the hymn writer and his unquestionable trust in his *istadevata*, Jesus Christ. He holds there are no enemies for those who learn friendship of the tolerance from Jesus.

### Hymn 5

The Name of Jesus is so sweet  
The Name of Jesus is so sweet

It grants peace and tranquility in the soul  
And breaks the grievances,  
Cuts delusion into pieces  
It gives witness to reach the stage of redemption  
And enables us to achieve imperishable salvation.<sup>7</sup>

### Hymn 6

Jesus' name enlightens the hearts of the servants  
It destroys the evil acts, is holy and life-giving.  
His acts encourage the souls of the righteous,  
Remove the afflictions of those who listen to His teachings,  
They are the means of achieving redemption.  
His lotus feet, sunk in blood, are worthy

6 Ibid., 379.

7 Ibid., 123.

Of being worshipped by the *bhaktas*; and He is the Anointed of the Kingdom of the redeemed people.<sup>8</sup>

Choudhari states that from the agitated mind arise sorrow (*cinta*). Sorrow causes delusion (*bhranti*). To overcome sorrow, one has to chant the name of Jesus. It gives peace of mind. Above all, it enables the *bhakta* to reach the stage of redemption and imperishable salvation. Choudhari also views contemplating on the person of Jesus bring peace and serenity. Therefore, he calls for a *bhakta* not only to glorify the name of Jesus but also to glorify the entire body of Jesus.<sup>9</sup>

Few other Christological works of Choudhari worth mentioning are: *Yesu Nayaka Shatakamu*, Jesus as the Lord (1845), *Yesu Kristu Prabhu Shatakamu*, Jesus is Lord and mediator (1845), *Pancha Chamara Pannamulu*, Jesus as the enfleshed one and *Kristava Niti Prakashamu*, Jesus as Wisdom Teacher (1851).

Therefore, we can conclude that for Choudhari, the image of God is none other than Jesus Christ. He experienced and expressed God in terms of Jesus Christ. As a convert from Hinduism, he took the polemic stance of rejecting Hindu deities and projecting Jesus Christ as the only savior of the world.

### Gurram Jashuva - Christ the *dalit*

Padma Shri Gurram Jashuva Kavi was born in 1895, in a village of Vinukonda in Guntur District. Jashuva was a modern Telugu poet of calibre, emerging from a *dalit* community. While speaking to his daughter, he said that he has learnt many lessons in life. The acute poverty taught him to be patient and the caste-creed discrimination taught him to protest against remaining a slave. He decided to rip himself free from the bondages of poverty and caste. His strength of poetry became a sword. His enemy was not the society but its life-partners, like religion and culture.<sup>10</sup> Swarnalatha affirmed that Jashuva “was a *dalit* and his expressions and aspirations are representative of all *dalits*, who are struggling to realize God’s action among them, for

8 Ibid., 124.

9 R. R. Sundara Rao, *Bhakti Theology in the Telugu Hymnal*, 64.

10 Cf. M. E. Prabhakar, “In Search of Roots – Dalit aspirations and the Christian Dalit Question: Perceptions of the Telugu Poet laureate, Jashuva,” *Religion and Society*, XLI, 1 (1994): 3f.

the restoration of their divine image.”<sup>11</sup> In later part of his life, Jashuva held that he was profoundly moved by the teachings of Christ. He was strongly influenced by Christ’s outlook of humanity, equality and spirit of obedience. Jashuva tore into pieces the hypocrisy of religion with his mighty works, *Kristu-Charitra* (The Story of Jesus) and *Gabbilam* (The Bat).

### Poem 1

I have diligently studied Biblical doctrines  
I have prayed, bending my head, for removal of untouchability  
I’ve taken baptism, placing my hand on my breast  
I’ve tried to love my enemy even as my brother  
I’ve learnt to do what I said and keep my word...<sup>12</sup>

### Poem 2

Jesus sacrificed Himself, for the good of the world  
How come the divisive doctrines and denominations  
Caste factions, communal problems and troubles,  
Preaching words without doing good works is not Salvation.<sup>13</sup>

### Poem 3

You (Jesus) have demonstrated to all equality,  
Eating with the poor and despised tax-collectors  
You have shown to the world, your humility  
Washing and wiping your disciples’ feet  
Come to my house too, great teacher.  
You have displayed the essence of Love  
By embracing the world, so let me embrace you too.<sup>14</sup>

### Poem 4

The Heavenly Father has freely given  
To all the inhabitants of the Earth  
Water, air and fire as permanent gifts

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11 P. S. Ranjan, “Christian Dalit Aspirations as Expressed by Jashuva Kavi in *Gabbilam* (the Bat)”, *Religion and Society*, 34, 3 (1987): 58.

12 G. Jashuva, *My Story*, Poem 46.

13 G. Jashuva, *Gabbilam*, Poem 110.

14 G. Jashuva, *Kandakavyamu*, Part. 1, 48.

Only the meanest and the ungodly  
 Will taint these great elements  
 With untouchability, caste and clan  
 Bringing shame to the citizens of the world.<sup>15</sup>

### Poem 5

They did not teach really who God is or who the devil is  
 The false teachers they were, they taught only  
 Strange theologies and wild ideologies to make  
 The people fanatic, for their own gain and pleasure.<sup>16</sup>  
 Gleefully gathered in that assembly were city-elders,  
 Famous scribes and lawyers, orthodox caste-demons,  
 Rich men who lived off the poor and the fat  
 Of daily temple sacrifices, and curious spectators all.<sup>17</sup>

### Poem 6

Who's this young lad, thought they  
 Who confronted and defeated them,  
 The undefeated wise-men of world-fame,  
 Thus shamed and angry they growled  
 That his beard did not lend him dignity,  
 Grinding their teeth and pulling at their beards,  
 The learned *pundits* rose up on their stiff limbs  
 And left the hall overcome by their envy.<sup>18</sup>

Jashuva's cry is the common use of natural resources, by all members of a community, irrespective of their caste or creed. This aspect he brings out forcefully in one of his poems of the encounter between the Samaritan woman and Jesus. Jashuva calls Christ as the teacher of gods. Jashuva's primary interest was to portray Christ and his salvation to the hearers, in their own living context.<sup>19</sup>

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15 G. Jashuva, *Kristu Charitra: The Life of Christ, A Poem in Telugu*, (Madras: Diocesan Press, 1963), Poem, 128.

16 Ibid., Poem, 73.

17 Ibid., Poem, 412.

18 Ibid., Poem, 78.

19 Cf. M. E. Prabhakar, "In Search of Roots-Dalit aspirations and the Christian Dalit Question: Perceptions of the Telugu Poet laureate, Jashuva", in *Religion and Society*, XLI, 1, (1994): 7f.

## Dusi Devaraj - Christ, the Eucharist

It is a common phenomenon to notice among Telugu Christians that they are fond of singing a number of hymns before, during and after the Eucharist. Devaraj, a Catholic priest of Srikakulam Diocese takes this dimension seriously in his work as a pastor. For the past twenty years, he has brought about two hundred hymns. These hymns are the outcome of his personal experience with Jesus Christ in the daily Eucharist. He is convinced that the mystery of the Eucharist is the centre of Christian life. Partaking in the body and blood of Jesus brings about transformation in life. Hence, he holds that it is in the Eucharist that the *bhakta* enters into deep union with Jesus. We shall have a look at some of his hymns.

### Hymn 1

Receive in the Eucharist  
Sweet filled Jesus  
Christ the icon of Love  
Receive Him in our hearts

Our heart filled desires  
Let us share with Him  
Desire is to reach His feet  
Let us sing praises to Jesus

Jesus removed our sins  
Jesus granted us salvation  
Let us bow and adore Him  
In the Eucharist, our Lord

In times of tribulations  
Jesus will not abandon us  
Jesus is our Life  
Jesus is our source.<sup>20</sup>

### Hymn 2

The banquet of our God, the Father  
The banquet of Jesus' friendship  
Lord's banquet, let us receive  
Lord's banquet, let us partake joyfully

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20 D. Devaraj, *Jeevasruti: Bhakti and Liturgical Hymns* (Vijayawada: Kaladarshini, 2005), 84.

The banquet of heavenly beings  
 The banquet Israel received  
 The banquet of Manna, those days  
 The banquet of life, in our day  
 The banquet of Last Supper  
 The banquet the disciples waited  
 The banquet of bread and wine  
 The banquet of Salvation

The banquet quests hunger  
 The banquet removes deprivation  
 The banquet fills all our desires  
 The banquet gives New Life.<sup>21</sup>

### Hymn 3

Jesus fruit of Love, Lord of Life  
 Jesus, the Eucharist, resting place  
 This is my body, take and eat  
 This is my blood, receive and drink

You are my friends and servants  
 You stood for friendship you are witnesses  
 Receive the Holy Spirit understand the truth  
 I am the way, the truth, the life

You are my beloved disciples you stood by me  
 If you render service, you are my witnesses  
 Receive the Holy Spirit win the World  
 I am the way, the truth, the life

Touch my wounds receive peace in life  
 Look at my hands receive Holy Life  
 Believe in me, I am with you always  
 I am the way, the truth, the life.<sup>22</sup>

### What can we learn from this study?

1. Invariably, all these poets and hymn writers call us to a personal encounter with Jesus so as to rediscover Jesus in his mission to God and life.

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21 Ibid., 86. 22 Ibid., 90.

2. This study shows us that the reality of Jesus Christ expressed is not merely at the conceptual level but more at the relational level.

3. This study emphasizes that merely an awareness, contemplation and inspiration are not sufficient but emotions have to play a greater role in relating to Jesus Christ (*istadevata*). We find close resonance with Ignatius of Loyola, who speaks of “Application of Senses” in his Spiritual Exercises.

4. This study finds echo with today’s contextual Christology. One of the specific characters of contextual Christology is to pay attention to the inner longings of a believer or faith community that emerge from “below”. This study is an example in form, content and language of what emerges from “below”.

5. Pope John Paul II rightly says, “The need to evangelize in ways that appeal to the sensibilities of the Asian peoples, and the suggested images of Jesus which would be intelligible to Asian minds and cultures and, at the same time, faithful to the Sacred Scripture and Tradition. Among them were Jesus Christ as the Teacher of Wisdom, the Healer, the Liberator, and the Spiritual guide, the Enlightened One, the Compassionate Friend of the Poor, the Good Samaritan, the Good Shepherd, and the Obedient One.”<sup>23</sup> The above-mentioned poets and hymn writers beckon us for new images of Jesus. An “image” of Jesus Christ implies more than a Christological statement. An image functions like a complex symbol that fuses together intellectual understandings, emotional responses, and relational styles.

6. The First Asian Mission Congress held in Thailand, October 2006 holds that the Story of Jesus must be told in Asian Life, to Peoples of Other Faiths and in the Cultures of Asia. The above study shows us that we cannot tell the story of Jesus until we draw cultural richness from our traditions.

## Conclusion

In India today, the questions raised are: who is Jesus Christ? How is he different from other savior figures? What is special about Jesus? We, Indian theologians, are convinced that Jesus is to be interpreted in the context of multi-religious, cultural traditions and its socio-economic and political systems. The present study, Christ in Telugu poetry is a small attempt to unearth Jesus Christ who has been buried

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23 *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 20.

in the history of Telugu people. I am sure; this study will be of some help to those who promote the emerging Indian Christology of religions and cultures, and of liberation of broken ones. The images like Jesus, the *Sadguru* and Jesus, the *dalit*, are attempts to articulate the experience of Telugu peoples in Telugu language. We conclude that in every age, people are confronted with the question, "Who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16.15). The response to this question will depend on the depth of the personal experience or encounter with Jesus Christ.

Satyodayam

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# Christology in the Kristapurāṇa of Thomas Stephens (1549-1619)

Nelson Falcao

Four hundred years ago, Thomas Stephens set the tone for a paradigm shift in the Gospel-Culture encounter. He attempted to present Jesus Christ through the eleven thousand verses of his monumental Biblical Epic, the Kristapurāṇa. His intention was to initiate his readers to the Christian faith while socially and culturally living as Indians. He narrated the Biblical Story of the Old and the New Testaments, in the religious language of the Hindus. Keeping the Christian doctrine intact, he communicated the Good News to the people in the style of great mystic poets like Ekantha (ca.1535-1599) and Jñāneśvara (1275-1296). It was observed by the scholars that through this Epic Thomas Stephens kept Christ the *murti* in the Hindu temple (*mandira*).

## 1. Introduction

The Kristapurāṇa of Thomas Stephens is a substantial contribution to the most burning question of contemporary theology: the place of Jesus Christ in the religious pluralism of our time. Christians were surrounded by a multitude of other religions. But it was in the uniqueness of the Christian revelation that the Church felt secure and tried to follow to the full the command of Jesus to go and preach to all the nations. Europe remained the Christian continent for long and carried out its responsibility of proclaiming the Good News of salvation in Christ to all the peoples of the other continents. But today Europe is no more a Christian continent. Moreover, Christians have learnt to respect the other religions. All religions in their own way claim to lead their followers to the ultimate goal and aim of life, fulfillment, salvation.

What is more, the Church in the Second Vatican Council recognized that people of all faiths can find salvation if they follow well the dictates of their conscience and their convictions. "The Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions" (*Nostra Aetate* 2). Then, what about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ? The Church has always affirmed it and very recently has reasserted it in "Dominus Jesus" (06-08-2000). But the question remains: How to reconcile the uniqueness of Christ with the other religions towards which the Church is opening up.

For Christianity in particular, to remain a meaningful, vibrant and living faith; its power, beauty and message of Eternal Salvation needs to be presented anew in a mould that is congruent with the life and times of a modern day people. It needs to be revitalized in its idiom and culture, it must be translated into a living culture that influences the values, hopes, dreams, and aspirations of the people. This effective communication of the Gospel can sprout only from a seed that is planted in the native and root paradigm of a people.

India, in particular, has to shed the shackles of Western models which have hitherto influenced and coloured Indian Christian life.<sup>1</sup> The early Christian communities in the Mediterranean world were shaped by the Greco-Roman culture, in particular by Greek philosophy and Roman law. Christian doctrine was expressed according to the thought-patterns of the Stoic and Platonic philosophies. Later Scholasticism re-expressed the Christian doctrine in Aristotelian categories. While Western theology is well developed and is valuable for the Church, it still remains largely European and it belongs to Europe; it does not find adequate resonance in the Eastern situation and context. Problems should no more be viewed from a Western perspective. Christian life should not be imported from Europe to India - rather it should grow in Indian soil, should be made to develop in our

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1 Cf Errol D'Lima, "Decolonization of Religious Life," *Jnanadeepa*, Vol. 1 (July 1998), no. 2, 117-125; From the same issue of *Jnanadeepa* cf also: Paul Puthanangady, "Decolonization of Liturgy", 91-98; Samuel Rayan, "Decolonization of Theology", 140-155; Kurien K., "The Indian Church of the Future", 156-169.

rich and varied cultures and it should be expressed in Indian symbols.

I would not like to enter into any theological controversies and discussions as regards the place of Jesus Christ in the religious pluralism of our time. Rather I would like to present a great and yet a forgotten man, Thomas Stephens, S.J. (1549-1619) and his Christology which is interwoven into the eleven thousand verses of his monumental Biblical Epic, the Kristapurāṇa. He presented Jesus Christ through the Purāṇa, i.e., India's religious literature, and thus initiated his readers to the Christian faith while socially and culturally living as Indians. He narrated the Biblical Story of the Old and the New Testaments, in the religious language of the Hindus. Keeping the Christian doctrine intact, he communicated the Good News to the people of Sāsaṭī, Goa, in Brāhmaṇa-Marāṭhā vernacular, in the style of Ekanātha (ca.1535-1599)<sup>2</sup> and Jñāneśvara (1275-1296).<sup>3</sup> Thomas Stephens' integration of certain vital Hindu Vaiṣṇavaite elements into the Christian tradition could be compared to Thomas Aquinas'

2 Ekanātha was a Marathi Hindu scholar and poet. He was born at Paihan in Mahārāṣṭrā, India. He was a disciple of Janārdana Swāmī of Devagirī, studied Jñāneśvarī with him and wrote several books on the legends from the Purāṇas. He edited Jñāneśvarī which was written 300 years before him; he gathered all the manuscripts and restored the commentary of Jñāneśvara on Bhagavad-Gītā, to its original form. He also reconstructed the tomb of Jñāneśvara at Ālandī. He rendered Bhāgavata into Marāṭhī; he was not able to complete his Marāṭhī translation of the Rāmāyaṇa. Cf N.K. Gadare, *Mahārāṣṭra Mahodayācā Pūrvaraṅga* (Mumbai: Mahārāṣṭra Rājya Sāhitya Saṃskṛti Maṇḍala, 1971); Ś.D. Peṇḍase, *Mahārāṣṭrācā Bhāgavata Dharma: Bhāgavatottam Sant Śrī Ekanātha* (Nāgapūr: Nāgapūr Prakāśan, 1971); G.B. Saradāra (ed.), *Ekanātha - Darśan* (Pune: Modern Book Depot Prakāśan, 1978); A.N. Deśapāṇḍe, *Prācīna Marāṭhī Vāṅmayācā Itihāsa*, Vol. 4 (Pune: Venus Prakāśan, 1977); H.V. Ināmdār, L.R. Naśīrābādakar and M.S. Gosāvī (eds.), *Mahārāṣṭrācā Lokanātha - Sant Ekanātha* (Nāsika: Pratiṣṭhāna Prakāśan, 1988); H.V. Ināmadār (ed.), *Sant Ekanātha Darśan* (Pune: Continental Prakāśan, 1983); M. R. Dātār, *Sant Kavi Ekanātha* (Pune: Snehalā Prakāśan, 1997); N.R. Phāṭaka, *Ekanātha - Vāṅgamaya āṇi Kārya* (Mumbai: Mauja Prakāśan, 1963).

3 Jñāneśvara (1275-1296) was a Marāṭhī Hindu writer and yogi. His father, Vithobā, leaving his wife and children, became a *saṃnyāsī* by giving false information about his family obligations to his *gurū*. When the *gurū* discovered the real truth, he forced him to give up his new status and revert to

incorporation of Aristotle's philosophical method into Christianity or to St. Paul's incorporation of Hellenic philosophy into Jewish Christianity.

Today, there is an urgent need to present the Christian message in a more Indian way and a greater need to present Jesus Christ in the wider context of God's universal saving love. The proclamation of Jesus Christ has to be within God's universal plan of creation and redemption. This plan is founded on the Revelation of the Trinitarian God, communicated in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit; hence, the Christological themes should be developed and situated within the network of the Trinity.<sup>4</sup> So far, the approach of presenting Jesus Christ and his Message has been too defensive and apologetic. If 'Jesus Christ the One and Only Saviour' is stressed beyond a certain point, the basis for dialogue with other religions may be excluded. We should open our hearts to other religions; we need to explore 'what kind of Jesus will be the light to the people of India'. We need to research and study the fundamentals of the religiosity of the Indian people, to try and discover how Jesus Christ is answering their needs. The need today is to present the person of Jesus Christ and his message in a wider, less dogmatic, more inviting and inspiring manner. Such a message should be lived in the Church and communicated to those of other faiths. The struggling Christian minority in India, has to tread a path in the midst of both ancient and modern Hindu and other ideologies. It should be

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the 'householder state'. The orthodox *brāhmins* did not accept the reversal of status and made the whole family outcaste. Although *brāhmins* by birth, the children were denied formal education because they were considered outcastes. His eldest brother, Nivṛattinātha became a *yogi* of the Nātha sect and instructed Jñāneśvara and helped him to be a *yogi* and attain *jñāna*. Jñāneśvara mentions this Nātha tradition in his commentary on Bhagavad-Gītā where he also lists the *gurus* of the sect before Nivṛattinātha. Jñāneśvara performed minor miracles and convinced the orthodox *brāhmins* of his *yogic* powers. In the year 1290, at the age of 15, he composed his famous Marāṭhī commentary entitled *Bhāṅvārtha-dīpikā*, i.e., the Lamp of Plain Meaning, on the Bhagavad-Gītā. It is the most respected work in Marāṭhī literature and has come to be known as Jñāneśvarī. Jñāneśvara is revered as a divine figure. His other works are *Anṛtānubhava*, *Yogavāṣiṣṭha* and *Advaitanirupaṇa*. According to the *yogic* tradition he buried himself alive in 1296.

4 Cf *Proposals of the Asian Synod Presented to the Pope*, p. 10.

communion and dialogue rather than a one-way communication of concepts and doctrines. Jesus Christ should neither be isolated from nor seen as antagonistic to ancient Hindu spirituality. This is exactly what Thomas Stephens did. He placed Jeju Swāmī in a beautifully decorated Hindu temple. Dr. S.G. Tuḷapuḷe affirms:

Without sliding out even a little bit from the basic truth in the Bible, putting an Eastern (*paurvārtya*) dress/garb (*veṣa*) agreeable to the Hindu mind, and that also in poetic form, on to the life of Christ (*Kristacaritra*), was truly a difficult task. But Stephens has done it. He has kept to the language (*bhāṣā*), conduct (*vr̥tta*), ideas (*kalpanā*), imagination of poets (*kavisāṅketa*) and all other poetic forms (*kāvyaāṅge*) in pure (*assala*) Marāṭhī. The Deity inside is that of Jesus Christ, the temple (*maṇḍira*) is Hindu “*murti Khristācī madira Hiduce*”; such is the arrangement of this Purāṇa.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Life and Times

Thomas Stephens was a Jesuit missionary and poet, proficient in Marathi, Konkani, Sanskrit, English and Portuguese languages. He was born at Clyffe Pipard, Bushton, Wiltshire, South England in 1549 and died in Goa (Portuguese India), in 1619. His father, a merchant by profession, was also named Thomas Stephens (Stevens) of Bushton, and his mother's name was Jane.

Thomas Stephens was elected a scholar of Winchester in 1564. His name is mentioned in Thomas Frederick Kirby's Winchester Scholars on page 139. It appears in the list of boys who went to Winchester College in 1564. His age is given as 13 and place of birth as Bourton, Dorset in this source. Herbert Chitty (1863-1949), conducted some independent research into the birthplace and family of Thomas Stephens. This was published in the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine, vol. xxxii, p. 220. In this article, he shows that Kirby did not use the original Winchester College registers to compile his book and confused Bourton, Dorset,

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5 Cf S.G. Tuḷapuḷe, “Marāṭhīcā Khristī Purāṇika” *Pratiṣṭhāna*, (February 1954), p. 14. (The translation from Marathi to English is mine).

with Bushton, a hamlet in the village of Cliffe Pypard, Wiltshire. The Stephens family seems to have lived in the largest house there around 1576. The name Thomas Stephens occurs in a lay subsidy roll of 1576. This was probably the father of the missionary.

From Winchester College statutes (translated into English by James Sabben-Clare, a former headmaster) we learn that the education of the boys at Winchester College was to be in reading, plainsong and grammar from the book by Donatus, which dates from about 1000 years before the College was founded. The headmaster and an usher were to teach them. The seeds of the great future linguist, poet and grammarian were sown here at Winchester College.

There is no evidence that Thomas Stephens ever was a member of the university of Oxford or a fellow of New College. His name does not appear either in the university matriculation registers or in the New College registers.

According to the statutes of Winchester College a boy was allowed to study in the College till the age of eighteen. Obviously, Thomas Stephens too must have studied at Winchester College till he was eighteen, i.e., till 1567. It was the time when Queen Elizabeth reigned supreme. Due to persecution of the Catholics by the Anglicans, the Catholics had to run away. Thomas Stephens fled to Rome and while there he entered the Society of Jesus on October 20, 1575.<sup>6</sup> If Thomas Stephens did not do his university studies at Oxford or New College then after his School years at Winchester College, i.e., from 1568 to 1575 what did he do? That remains to be explored.

The Portuguese had settled in Goa around 1510. The conversion of Hindus to Christianity began with the arrival of Francis Xavier as Papal Nuncio in 1542. But the converts remained faithful to their old religious literature and traditional ritualistic practices; which finally led

6 "Briṭiśa Dharmagur ne Lihilele Marāṭhī Mahākāvya: Sāḍetīna Śatakāpūrvī cyā Ovyāncī Bhāṣā Samīśra, Apabhraṃśa kamī - Mukteṣvarācyā toḍice Kāvyaḡaṇa, prācīna Marāṭhīcyā Abhyāsālā Granthācī Madata," *Sakāḡa*, Mumbai-Pune (Sunday, December 22, 1957), 6, column 1; Cf Georg Schurhammer, "Thomas Stephens, 1549-1619", *The Month*, Vol. 13 (April 1955) n. 4, 198; "An Immortal Work by an English Jesuit", *Letters and Notices*, Vol. 66 (November 1961) n. 325, 198.

to the Inquisition in 1560.<sup>7</sup> Francis Xavier wrote moving letters to Europe asking for helpers in the work of Evangelization in India and the Far East. Stephens reading some of the letters was inspired and wanted to go to India for missionary work. He was granted the permission.

Stephens left Lisbon by sea on April 4, 1579 and arrived in Goa via the Cape of Good Hope, by October 24, 1579.<sup>8</sup> Fr. Thomas Stephens is commonly known as the 'first Englishman to have set foot in India (in 1579). But, according to Fr. Georg Schurhammer, there were two other Englishmen, unrecognisable as such by their Portuguese names, who were wounded in the siege of Diu in 1546.<sup>9</sup> Stephens wrote on November 10, 1579 to his father in England about his voyage and of the Portuguese commercial ventures in the East. These letters must have gone around his father's commercial acquaintances giving them hope and future prospects for business.<sup>10</sup> Philip Anderson in his book *The English in Western India*, states that "his advices were the strongest inducements which London merchants had been offered, to embark on India for speculation."<sup>11</sup> This account was also communicated and published in the travel books of Hakluyt, Purchas, and John Hamilton Moore and it may have possibly led to the incorporation of the East India Company in 1599.

Stephens spent thirty-nine years in Goa and one year in Vasai fort (Bassein, Mumbai). He was known as Padre Estevão. He was socius,

7 Cf "Briṭiśa Dharmagurūne Lihilele Marāṭhī Mahākāvya," *Sakāḷa*, 6, column 1; "An Immortal Work by an English Jesuit", 198. In the Kristapurāṇa (I.1.140-145) the Hindu converts affirm that they could not read the Portuguese Purāṇas because they did not know the language and they could not read the Hindu Purāṇas because they were suppressed or taken away from them (I.1.143). Thus, they asked for new or substitute Pur as in Marathi language. Stephens takes up the challenge to satisfy their demand.

8 Cf K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, "Stephens, Thomas", *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XIII (1981), 702. Cf. "Briṭiśa Dharmagurūne Lihilele Marāṭhī Mahākāvya," *Sakāḷa*, 6, column 1;

9 Cf Georg Schurhammer, "Thomas Stephens, 1549-1619", 198; "An Immortal Work by an English Jesuit", 198.

10 Thomas Stephens, *Christian Puranna*, Ed. J. F. Saldanha, Biographical Note (Mangalore: St. Aloysius' College, 1907), p. XXXIV.

11 Philip Anderson, *The English in Western India* (London: 1856), p. 7.

Vicar and Rector for various years in Goa. From the Roman archives,<sup>12</sup> the work of Stephens is chronologically documented from the manuscripts of the Jesuit Society of the Goa Province:

## GOA 24

PAGE	YEAR	EVENT
p. 123	24th October, 1579	Arrived in India in the ship S. Lourenço: Stephens, Scholastic
139 v	1584	Salsette College: Fr. Thomas Stephens
160	1587	Mormugão cum socio ex convalescentibus
176	1588	Mormugão
220 v	1594	Margão, rector
229 v	1594	ib. preaches and hears confessions in lingua Canarin
267 v	1596	Mormugão, Vicar
273	1597	ib.
312	1599	Benaulim, Vicar
288	1599	Vows as Co-adjutor Spiritualis
316	1601	Vicar of Benaulim (perhaps resident in Margão)
366	1605	25 years in Salsette, knows the language
390 v	1606	Loutolim, Vicar
407	1608	Knows the language well
414	1608	Loutolim, Vicar

12 Cf Georg Schurhammer, "Thomas Stephens, 1549-1619", 203-204; Cf S. G. Malshe, *St̥phansacyā Kr̥stapurāṇācā Bhāṣika āṇi Vāṅgamay̥ṇa Abhy*

GOA 27		
PAGE	YEAR	EVENT
folio 11	1610	Salsette, Rector of the College
17 v	December, 1611	Bassein College, "Mestre da Lingoa". The College has 11 Fathers, 13 Scholastics and lay-brothers.
20	1612	Salsette, Vicar (Goa Salsette)
24 v	1613	ib.
30	1614	ib.
33	1616	ib.
37 v	1618	Navelim, Vicar

## GOA 25

PAGE	YEAR	EVENT
4 v	1614	Rachol and residences. Stephens, 65 years, 49 in the order, studied philosophy and Mathematics, one year Theology; was Rector of Salsette 5 years, was minister of the professed house, some months companion of Visitor, 34 years in the Mission.

*āsa*, pp. 39-40. Malshe in his thesis affirms that the above chronological documentation was provided by Fr. Georg Schurhammer but does not give the exact reference.

### 3. Works

Stephens learnt Konkani, the local language of Goa. He also mastered Sanskrit and literary Marathi, the language of the medieval saints of Maharashtra,<sup>13</sup> Jñānesvara (1275-1296) and Nāmadeva (1270?-1350?) and his contemporary Ekanātha (1535-1599). During his thirty-nine years (1579-1611, 1613-1619) in Goa and one year (1611-1612) in Vasai, north Mumbai, Thomas Stephens wrote the following works:

1. Thomas Estevão, *Arte de Lingoa Canarim*, Rachol 1640 (a Konkani grammar in Portuguese, posthumous publication; second edition edited by Sr. J. H. da Cunha Rivara and published in 1857 in Goa).

2. Thomas Estevão, *Doutrina Christã em lingua Bramana-Canarin*, Rachol 1622 (a manual of Christian doctrine in the spoken dialect of Goa, posthumous publication; second edition edited by Dr. Mariano Saldanha and published in 1945 in Lisbon).

3. Thomas Estevão, *The Christian Purāṇa*, first edition 1616, second edition 1649, third edition 1654, a Biblical Epic on the coming of Jesus Christ the Saviour into the world. This work is based on the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, written in two parts of 36 and 59 *prasangus* or *avasvaras*, totalling 10,641 strophes in the ovi meter.<sup>14</sup> The three publications in Roman Script, do not seem to be

13 "Bṛiṭīśa Dharmagurūne Lihilele Marāṭhī Mahākāvya," *Sakāla*, 6, column 1.

14 In the Marsden Version, *Ādipurāṇa* (Paile Purāṇa) consists of 4,035 strophes (ovi) divided into 36 Prasangu and Devapurāṇa (Dusare Purāṇa) consists of 6,606 strophes (ovi) divided into 58 Prasangu. In each of the three SDB editions, Paile Purāṇa consists of 4,181 strophes (ovi) divided into 36 Avasvarū and Dusare Purāṇa consists of 6,781 strophes (ovi) divided into 59 Avasvarū; the total strophes (ovi) amount to 10,962; thus, Marsden Version has 321 strophes (ovi) and one Prasangu (Avasvarū) less than the three SDB editions; SDB means the following: 'S' refers to the fourth edition (roman script) in 1907 at Mangalore, St. Aloysius' College, edited by Joseph L. Saldanha; 'D' refers to the sixth edition (the second in *Devanāgarī* script) in 1996 in Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1996, edited by Caridade Drago, S.J. and 'B' refers to the fifth edition (the first in *Devanāgarī* script) in 1956 in Pune, edited by Prof. Shantaram Bandelu, Prof. at Ahmednagar College, Ahmednagar. Cf "Bṛiṭīśa Dharmagurūne Lihilele Marāṭhī Mahākāvya: Sādetīna Śatakāpūrvīcyā Ovyāncī Bhāṣā Samīśra, Apabhraṃśa kamī - Mukteṣvarācyā toḍīce Kāvyaḡaṇa, prācīna Marāṭhīcyā Abhyāsālā Granthācī Madata," *Sakāla*, 6, column 5.

available anywhere in the world today.<sup>15</sup>

## 4. Why the Kristapurāṇa

### 4.1. Meaning of Purāṇa

Thomas Stephens composed a Purāṇa on Christ and not an *Upaniṣad*, *Veda* or *Vijñāṇa*. 'Purāṇa' is a Sanskrit word meaning 'ancient'. The word *purī* means city and so we have in the Indian tradition *Rāmpurī*, *Brahmapurī*, *Igatpurī*, and others. Thus, Purāṇa is an ancient story describing city life. In Hinduism, Purāṇa is a class of Sanskrit verse texts which contain sacred mythological accounts and poetical writings of ancient days, which treat chiefly, the creation, the gods, heroes and others. A proper Purāṇa should expound the five subjects (*pañca-lakṣaṇa*), namely, creation (*sarga*), genealogy of gods and *rsis* (*vaṁśa*), the reigns of the Manus (*manvantara*), destruction and re-creation with the history of humanity (*pratisarga*) and legendary history of the Solar and Lunar dynasties (*vaṁśā nucarita*).<sup>16</sup> It is believed that Purāṇas are generally revealed by *ṛsis* or animals; they are written in dialogue form and have a prophetic tone. There are two categories of Purāṇas, namely, MahāPurāṇas or Major Purāṇas<sup>17</sup> and Upapur as or Minor Purāṇas. Each type consists of

- 15 According to Ś. G. Tulapule the "Christian Purāṇa" of Stephens was first written by him in Portuguese; an epic on the advent and life of Jesus Christ the Saviour into the world, based on the Bible, under the title: *Discurso sobre a Vinda e Vida do Jesus Christo*. Cf Tulapule, Ś. G. "Marāṭhīcā Khristī Purāṇika", 12.

Like Stephens, Beschi composed *Tēmbā vani* in Tamil and other Purāṇas were written, namely, a Purāṇa on St. Peter by Étienne de la Croix and another on St. Anthony by Antonio Saldanha.

- 16 Such a scheme is followed by very few Purāṇas. Viṣṇu Purāṇa follows it.
- 17 The eighteen Mahāpurāṇas are divided into three categories: 1) Brahmā (Rājasa Purāṇas, *rajas gua* prevailing) - i) Brahmā (or Ādi or Sāura; ii) Brahmāṇḍa; iii) Brahma-vāivarta; iv) Mārkaṇḍeya; v) Bhaviṣya; vi) Vāmana; 2) Viṣṇu (Sāttvika Purāṇas, *sattva guṇa* prevailing) - i) Viṣṇu; ii) Bhāgavata or Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, famous Purāṇa; iii) Nārada or Nāradya; iv) Garuḍa; v) Padma; vi) Vārāha; 3) The Tāmasa Purāṇas - i) Śiva; ii) Liṅga; iii) Skanda; iv) Agni; v) Matsya; vi) Kūrma. Besides the Mahāpurāṇas and Upapurāṇas there are many recent Purāṇic texts of archaic language. Cf NSD, Vols. 2-3, pp. 1418-1419. NSD means the following: Khanolkar, G. D. *The New Standard Dictionary*. Vols. II & III. Bombay: Jyoti Dhananjay Dhawale, 1995. NSD Sirmokadam, M. S. *The New Standard Dictionary*. Vol. I. Bombay: Jyoti Dhananjay Dhawale 1995.

eighteen Purāṇas. Miraculous manifestations of the Divine grace and Bhakti (devotion) are stressed. Hinduism is dominated by Purāṇic form of religiosity.

Purāṇa is different from Itihāsa. Itihāsa is a Sanskrit word meaning 'it was so' or 'it took place thus'. Itihāsa is history; it is a written, detailed and traditional account of affairs and events which took place in time and history. In India we have two Itihāsas, namely, Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata. The difference between Purāṇa and Itihāsa is this: Itihāsa is historical referring to time-space realities which 'took place'; Purāṇa is trans-historical relating to realities which are beyond time and space, such as creation, gods, man, world, Pāpa, Punya, Karma, Punarjanma, Vaikuṇṭha<sup>18</sup> and the like. Thus, Purāṇa consists of edifying stories extracted from history, and which are meant to promote principles of good, honest and integral life. The similarity between Purāṇas and Itihāsa is that both are considered Smṛti or non-Vedic Hindu scripture.<sup>19</sup>

Stephens' choice to write a Purāṇa on Christ should be appreciated; he soon realized that the Purāṇas were probably more appealing to the Sārasvat Brāhmaṇa-Marāṭhā mind of Sāsaṣṭī, than a systematic theological treatise. In fact, the Hindu converts asked Stephens for a Purāṇa on Christ for their reading, pass-time and entertainment (SDB I.1.128-170). Stephens read the Hindu Purāṇas available to him. He realized that the mysteries of the God-Man Christ, which are beyond human intellect, time and space could be better narrated through the genre of Purāṇa. He found Purāṇaic medium a powerful instrument to exhort his audience to lead good and honest lives in imitation of Jesus Christ.

18 This word 'Vaikuṇṭha' has occurred earlier in the 'Summary of the Research' which, strictly speaking, is not considered part of the study itself. Here it is occurring for the first time in the research proper. Hence, I would like to explain its meaning. It is a word which will be used very often without any translation. 'Vaikuṇṭha' means the paradise of Viṣṇu. It is stated by some to be in the Northern Ocean, by others, on the eastern peak of Mount Meru. It is the *nivās-sthāna* of Viṣṇu. 'Vaikuṇṭhanātha', 'Vaikuṇṭhnāyaka', 'Vaikuṇṭharājā', 'Vaikuṇṭharānā' are all names of Viṣṇu. 'Vaikuṇṭha-bhavana' or 'Vaikuṇṭha-bhuvana' means the world of Vaikuṇṭha or the paradise of Viṣṇu. Cf NSD, Vols. 2-3, pp. 2155-2156.

19 Cf NSD, Vol. 1, p. 94; Vols. 2-3, pp. 1418-1419.

By the third edition in 1654, the Kristapurāṇa of Stephens had become known and popular. There seem to be some references which point to the fact that probably Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (1630-1680) was aware of the existence of the monumental work of Kristapurāṇa. Shivaji was a visionary because he realized the importance of the printing press. There is no direct evidence to prove that he wanted to print the Kristapurāṇa of Stephens in Devanāgarī Script; but there are references that show that he was aware of the existence of the Kristapurāṇa written in the Marathi language and he was aware of the importance of the printing press and was trying to set up one for Devanāgarī printing.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4.2. Indian Elements in the Kristapurāṇa

In the Kristapurāṇa there are certainly many Indian, Konkan and Maharashtrian elements, words, images, concepts, ideas and interpretations. In keeping with the tradition of the Indian Purāṇas, the Kristapurāṇa begins with *ṇamana*, *mangalāharaṇa*, Devastuṭī, Santamahānta-stuṭī, asking for Divine help for the completion of the *Grantha*.

Besides the titles given to Jesus, there are several other expressions which are Indianized, a few of which could be mentioned here:

i. After the fast of forty days and nights, Jesus is served varieties of sweets on *patrāvalī*, i.e., a leaf used for having meals (II.20:140-143).

ii. 'The pleasures of this world will vanish like a dream' (I.6:54) is very much an Indian expression.

20 Cf T.S. Śejaṇalakar, *Śivacaritrācā Sankalpita Ārākhadhā*, Marāṭhā Mandir, pp. 120-130; the above reference shows that Shivaji was a visionary. Cf also *Śivakālina Patrasāra-Saṅgraha*, Vol. II, 1671; A. K. Priyoḷakar, *History of Printing Press in India: Its Beginnings and Early Development* (Bombay: Marathi Samshodhana Mandala, 1958); Pingē, *Yuropiyanācī Marāṭhī Vāṅgamayācī Sevā*, (Pune: 1960), pp. 2-16.

A certain Bhikāḷī Pārekha entered into negotiations with the Portuguese regarding purchasing and putting up a printing press for himself; he seems to have been in contact with Shivaji and the Portuguese regarding this; Cf *English Records on Shivaji* (compilation), Vol. I, Itihāsa Saṅśodhana Maṇḍaḷa (Index Item 2.5.3., 2.5.4.).

iii. Jesus' resurrected body is described as that which fire does not consume, water does not wet and air (*vāyu*) does not dry. This description is similar to the qualities of *ātman* as given in the Bhagavad Gītā (2:23).

iv. There seems to be a similarity between Sāvitrī from Vanaparvā of Mukteśvara (16:47-50) and the Virgin Mary (II.3:23-25).

v. The Archangel Michael told Lucifer and his followers to convert themselves and come back to the Lord and worship the Lord Almighty along with them by touching their head at God's feet (*charaṇāḥheṁīmāthā*) (I.2:100-101).

vi. Since there were/are hardly any shepherds in the Konkan Belt, contextually, he uses the word cow-herd, i.e., *gopālu* (I.5:63); and this word is used several times in the text. Some of these and several other inculturated expressions will be explored.

## 5. Hermenetical Presuppositions and Method of Stephens' Inculturated and Dialogical Christology

Stephens has made use of another religious tradition to communicate his message. He seems to be having a way of working with another tradition. Let us look at some of the principles of his inculturated and dialogical Christology process:

**1) Omission or Rejection of Terms:** He consistently avoids certain Hindu terms like Śruti, Avatāra, Yajña, Viṣṇu, Punarjanma and others which are proper to Hinduism. Theologically, some characteristics of the above terms are not applicable to the Christian tradition. So he does not accept or use these terms. From a psychological perspective, if such names were used in his Kristapurāṇa, the Hindus would have rejected them and it would have created animosity between Hindus and Christians.

**2) Acceptance and Adaptation of Words:** On the other hand, he does not reject all Hindu terms. He accepts other Hindu words like Smṛti, Naivedyu, Pujā, Deva-pujā, Homa, Arpaṇa, Samarpaṇa, Śāstra, Purāṇa, Śabda, Vāc, Vacana, Grantha, but quickly moves on to re-interpret them. He alters their semantics, giving them nuances of meanings, which are different from the original but suitable to Christian

doctrine. Often, he adds important qualifications and uses them to promote the primacy and authority of the Biblical Revelation and the Sacrifice of Christ. To secondary terms like *Smṛti* and *Śāstra*, he adds important qualifications so that the primary significance of the Christian Revelation and the Sacrifice of Christ is not diminished.

**3) Innovation or Creation of New Terms:** He shows innovation in formulating new terms like *Bhava-karma*, *Pāpa-karma*, *Karma-tama*, *Karma-chedanu*, *Śāstra-Purāṇa*, *Śāstra-Smṛti*, *Swāmīyā-Smṛti*, *Deva-kathā*, *Satva-kṛpā*, *Prakṛti-Śāstra*, *Kṛpā-Śāstra*, *Parama-Śāstra*, *Bhumī-vaikunṭha*, *Ānanda-sthāna*, *Ādipurūṣāce-karma*, *Svarga-dvāra*, *Mokṣa-dvāra*, *Mokṣa-māher*, *Vaikunṭha-Swāmī*, *Jñāna-snāna*, *Satva-kṛpā*, *Deva-Pujā*, and others.

**4) Borrowing Terms without Changing:** There are other terms which he safely takes over without changing them. Examples are: *Bhā vārthī*, *Vaikunṭha*, *Vaikunṭha-nagar*, *Vaikunṭha-rāyā*, *Vaikunṭha-rāṇā*, *Vaikunṭha-nātha*, *Bhakti*, *Mukti*, *Mokṣa*, *Karma* and others.

**5) Enrichment-Correction Encounter:** As a result of all the techniques he uses, we see the desired encounter taking place, which leads to mutual enrichment or correction. For example:

i. Stephens enriches the Christian tradition by using a creative term 'Ādipurūṣāce Karma' for the 'Original Sin'. But he drops the specific of 'Punarjanma' which is a definite connotation of Hindu Karma.

ii. In the Hindu tradition, Hindu Karma is reduced to ashes by *Jñāna*. Instead, in the Christian tradition, Stephens proposes *Jñāna-Dipu* (Light of Knowledge) and *Jñāna-snāna* (baptism) which dissolves the 'Ādipurūṣāce Karma'.

iii. Hindu *Mokṣa* implies overcoming *Punarjanma*. Christian *Mokṣa* overcomes *Mṛtyu*, *Devacāra*, *Pāpa* and *bhuta*.

iv. *Śruti* as *apauruṣeya* is a way to *Mukti*. Stephens interprets the Bible as *pauruṣeya* and the way to *Mukti*.

v. *Yajñā* of *Paramapurūṣa* creates the whole of the universe, whereas the Sacrifice of the God-Man destroys the sin of *Samśāra*, prepares for a new heaven and a new earth and gives *Mukti*.

**6) Continuity-Change Process:** In his reinterpretation of the

original 'Biblical Revealed Experience' into Hindu-Vaiṣṇavaite tradition a double process of Continuity-Change takes place. On the one hand, the original revealed message remains unchanged and permanent. On the other hand, Stephens brings in new elements of change which become part of a process of Continuity. The elements of change are the particular flavour or newness of vision which Stephens brings in while reinterpreting the Kathā of Kristu Swāmī, and these new elements are part of the process of Continuity. In short, it could be said that the aspects of Continuity-Change are inseparably interwoven in the hermeneutical process of inculturation of Stephens. For example he keeps in tact the original Christian Biblical Revealed experience as it is especially with its characteristics of being historical, non-eternal or Paurueya. But to the Vaiṣṇavaite audience for whom their Śruti is infallible, eternal or Apaurueya, he presents his permanent Biblical Revelation with a Change. What is the Change? He changes the Christian Revelation in such a way that it begins to look like a Christian Veda which then he presents indirectly. Deliberately leaving out the usage of the designation 'Śruti' he takes up the names of the secondary authoritative traditions like Smṛti, Śāstra, Purāṇa, etc. Further wiping out their secondary character and attributing to them primary qualifications he creates the new Swāmīyā Smṛti, Śāstra-Purāṇa, Śāstra of Swāmī, Śāstra-Smṛti, Swāmīyāce Śāstra, Smṛti of Swāmī, Śāstra-Grantha, Swāmīyāce Śabda, etc. as Pauruseya, primarily authoritative, infallible and way to Mukti. The Hindu secondary names become part of the Christian Revelation. Stephens thus creates a new way of proclaiming the permanent Biblical Revelation as Smṛti of Swāmī.

Another example. Stephens keeps as continuous and permanent the redemptive value of the Sacrifice of Christ on the cross and his resurrection. Totally leaving aside the Hindu specific designation of 'Yajña' he uses secondary names such as Pujā, Arpaṇa, Samarpaṇa, Homa and Naivedya in such a way that they evoke characteristics proper of Hindu Yajña. In the bargain the Sacrifice of Christ changes to "Pujā of Swāmī". But Stephens holds on to the new Pujā of Swāmī as the most proper, highest and the best. Those aspects remain permanent without changing. While holding on to these permanent

aspects he attempts to bring about a change in Swāmī's Pujā by trying to evoke the homologous equivalent of the Christian Sacrifice in the Hindu tradition. He tries to show that while the Yajña of Paramapurūṣa creates, the Pujā of Deva-Manuṣya (God-Man) on the cross re-creates or re-news the whole reality. Just as Yajña brings about a cosmic order and harmony by eradicating an-ta-Karma-Pāpam so also Swāmī's Pujā does likewise by eradicating Pāpam-Devacāra-Ādipurūśāce Karma-Maraṇa (evil-Satan-original sin-death). Negatively, the homologous equivalent between Yajña and Swāmī's Pujā is 'eradication of disorder or Karma-Pāpa'. Positively, the homologous equivalent is the 'order and harmony' of Yajña and the 're-creation' brought about by Swāmī's Pujā through the fulfilment of the Manoratha (Desire) of the Tribhuvan (three worlds). We notice how Stephens evolves a change in Swāmī's Pujā. He is not satisfied with the mere changing of name from 'Christian Sacrifice' to 'Swāmī's Pujā'. He searches for the homologous equivalent of Christian Sacrifice in the Hindu tradition and he finds it positively in 'order and harmony and re-creation' and negatively in 'eradication of disorder or Karma-Pāpa'. We intuit into the genius of Stephens here. He strikes at [much more] that unites rather than [the little] that divides. He underscores the commonality. He searches for the homologous equivalents. Keeping permanent what is essential to each tradition he prudently, cautiously and skillfully ventures out to change the accidental. But the change is deeper. The essential is stroked by new shades.

Here is yet another example. Stephens safeguards the doctrine of the Original Sin and its washing off through the sacrament of Baptism. Here again he searches for that which is common to both the traditions. He realizes that the Hindu metaphor of Uttama Puruṣa-Prakṛti-Karma-Punarjanma and the Christian metaphor of Original Sin are both ways of explaining the origin and existence of Pāpa in this Saṃsāra. He looks for the homologous equivalent of Original Sin in the Hindu tradition. And he finds that Karma is the homologous equivalent of Original Sin. Both the symbols are attempts to explain the cause of the 'Original Disorder' in this Saṃsāra. Renaming 'Original Sin' as 'Ādipurūśāce Karma' he makes the first change and leads the

Christian world into the Hindu world and vice-versa. Knowing well that Jñāna destroys Karma, Stephens hastens to bring about a change as regards the eradication of the Ādipurūśāce Karma. As a faithful Christian, he takes Baptism which according to the Christian tradition washes away the Original Sin and re-presents it as 'Jñāna-snāna' [immersion/bathing in Christ the Knowledge] eradicating the Ādipurūśāce Karma. He also presents Christ who destroys sin as the 'Jñāna Dipu' [Christ the Light of Knowledge] as the one who destroys the Ādipurūśāce Karma and leads to Mukti. Here we see that Stephens keeps permanent the traditional teaching of the Original Sin, Baptism and of Christ. He brings about the elements of change by presenting Ādipurūśāce Karma and Jñāna-snāna as the homologous equivalents of Hindu Karma and Jñāna.

We can go on giving enough and more examples of this type. However, I would like to conclude this section on Continuity-Change by stating one more example to drive home the point further. It is this. Stephens sustains uncompromisingly and skillfully the uniqueness and universality of the Christ Event. He admits that the salvation is ultimately through Kristu Swāmī, through his Parama Śāstra and his Pujā of all Pujās. But the change that Stephens brings about is through his openness to other religions. He invites all to live up to the calling of their own proper religions. He affirms that through the living of one's own Sva-dharma (religion) one can reach Vaikunṭha. He states that many good people like the Patriarchs, the prophets and others have reached Vaikunṭha even before the coming of Kristu Swāmī to this Saṃsāra, through the practice of Prakṛti- Śāstra and Śāstra of Moses. But again, he creatively preserves the continuity and the permanence of Kristu Swāmī by reserving the opening of the Svargadvāra or Vaikunṭha-dvāra which leads to the Darśan of the [essence of the ] Deva Bāpa, to Kristu Swāmī and he alone with his Parama-Śāstra and Jñāna-snāna (Baptism).

## 6. Reflection

### 6.1. Thomas Stephens' Action-Context

Why and what has Thomas Stephens done? Four hundred years ago, the first Englishman set foot on Indian soil, lived in that poor India

for forty years. In his own way and in his own time, at the request of the Hindu converts and taking note of the multi-religious and pluri-cultural world composed a Biblical Epic of a thousand pages (ca. 12,000 verses) in an Indian language, namely, Sanskritized Marathi. He set the tone for a paradigm shift in the Gospel-Culture encounter. Through his Kristapurāṇa he constructed a Hindu Mandir (temple) and installed inside it the Deity of Kristu Swāmī. In this Hindu Mandir (temple) of Kristu Swāmī he invites all to share the common Saṃsāra, the common Vaikunṭha and the common Lord, Vaikunṭha-nātha.

### **6.2. New Elements: Contribution to Indian Christology**

What fresh aspects are added by Thomas Stephens and how do they contribute to a new Indian understanding of Christ?

1) **Vaiṣṇavaite Interpretation:** Stephens interpreted the Tridentine (Hellenistic) Christ and the Bible in Vaiṣṇavaite tradition, as St. Paul interpreted the Jewish Christian faith into Greco-Hellenistic tradition and St. Thomas Aquinas did so in Aristotelian categories.

2) **Construction of a Hindu Temple through the Kristapurāṇa:** Through his Biblical Epic in verse form he seemed to construct a Hindu Temple but the Deity he installed in the Temple is Kristu Swāmī.

3) **Vaiṣṇavaite Names for Christ:** Stephens coins around 400 new Vaiṣṇavaite titles for Christ.

4) **Historical Pauruṣeya given Validity:** By showing the validity of the Bible which is a Pauruṣeya historical text, he enhances the value of other religious historical Pauruṣeya texts.

5) **Continuity-Change Process:** Keeping faithful to the Tridentine doctrine of the Christian faith he is able to bring in new elements, namely, Smṛti of Swāmī (Biblical Revelation), Pujā of Swāmī (Eucharist), Ādipurūṣāce Karma (Original Sin), Jñāna-snāna (Baptism), Parama-śāstra (Bible), Vaikunṭha-dvāra, (gate of heaven leading to Father's vision), and many others.

6) **Narrative Theology:** The Kristapurāṇa is a narrative theology. It is full of Biblical narrations and descriptions.

7) **Inculturated and Dialogical Christology:** He began the

process of an inculturated and dialogical Christology 450 years back. Through his *Kristapurāna* he tried to contribute to the most burning question of contemporary theology: the place of Jesus Christ in the religious and cultural pluralism of our time.

8) **Middle Path:** In his inculturated and dialogical Christology he followed the middle path, i.e., neither going against Christian doctrine nor going against Hinduism.

9) **Christian-Hindu Encounter:** He brought about a deep Christian-Hindu encounter, through continuity-change, i.e., continuity of doctrine and change of expression, and mutual enrichment-correction process.

## 7. Conclusion

Stephens is truly a genius. He has successfully managed to present *Krista-Kathā* (I.34.55),<sup>21</sup> *Deva-Kathā* (I.33.45) and *Deva-caritra* (I.33.45) before the Hindu converts. He has built trust and confidence between Christians and Hindus. Stephens seems to be getting more relevant and popular today, because he has shown himself to be open and broad-minded<sup>22</sup> in his inculturated and dialogical Christology.

In keeping with the theology of his times, he holds on to salvation only through Christ, and to the uniqueness and universality of Christ. But within this belief, his openness is evident from his acceptance of the fact that one can get salvation by living one's *Sva-dharma*, i.e., one's own religion. The final message he gives is that salvation is ultimately through Christ but immediately through the living of your *Sva-dharma* or one's own religion.

He speaks of many good people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and others going to *Vaikunṭha* merely by following the *Prakṛti-stra*. So also several Israelites go to *Vaikunṭha* by following of the *Śāstra* of Moses. Of course, he attributes the opening of the *Vaikunṭha-dvāra* to the *Parama-Śāstra* of Jeju Swāmī. In other words, the specific of *Parama-Śāstra* is that it gives one the vision (*Dar*

21 Other words used are: *Kṛiṣṭācī goṣṭī* (I.33.57) and *Devasutāc goṣṭī* (I.33.55). *Goṣṭa* means story. It is another word for *Kathā*.

22 Cf S. G. Malshe, *Ṣṭṭhansacyā Kṛiṣṭapurāṇācā Bhāṣika āṇi Vāgamayīna Abhyāsa*, p. 586.

an) of Vaikunṭha-nātha. But for entering Vaikunṭha, Prakṛti-Śāstra and the Śāstra of Moses were and are sufficient.

In some cases, he seems to agree to disagree. In doing this, he stoops to conquer. For example, he accepts the Varnas as they are, namely, Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, Śudras; and he asks all Varnas to listen to him. But at the same time, he speaks of the whole of humanity as one large human family originating from the same human parents, Ādipurūṣās or Adam and Eve. Stephens often speaks of salvation for all and about the universal call to be saved, i.e., the universal salvific plan of God.

Since change has become the only constant today, the mission of the Church in the emerging world today calls for a paradigm shift in thinking. The contexts and situations of many nations have changed due to deep transformations in the social, political, cultural and economic spheres. We find ourselves in the post-colonial era. The third world is emerging stronger with promising potential. People whose voices have been suppressed over centuries of colonial rule are now becoming vocal and are pressing for self-affirmation and rights that have long been denied to them, like equality and justice.

Unlike in the colonial era, when the Church commanded an aggressive position because of the power she wielded on the politics and economics of the times; today she appears to be on the defensive, trying to grapple and come to terms with the realities of re-awakened nations and a re-vitalised people, who are impatient to catch up with their perceptions of what they have lost over generations of colonial rule. Other modern day influences on the position of the Church are, the revival of the ancient cultures and the Eastern religions; the rise of Islam as a world power and the increasing consumerism, secularism, atheism and influences of contemporary international culture. Paradoxically, there also seems to be a surfeit of these in the first world countries and increasingly, trends are beginning to show that the wheel is turning full circle. Predictions are, that as we enter the new millennium, the hunger for Religion and Spirituality will increase.

Unable to cope with the tensions and pressures of modern day living and a fast changing world, the yearning for the solidity and dependability of religion will increasingly find priority in people's lives. How the Church positions herself and her mission in this re-defined world order will be crucial to her acceptance and penetration into the consciousness of a new generation of people. The Church's mission has to be visualized in the light of this contextual situation.

Four hundred years ago, Stephens set the tone for a paradigm shift in the Gospel-Culture encounter. After more than three centuries; with the Second Vatican Council, the Church accepted that she needed to radically re-think her position and her relationship with other cultures and religions. This need has only sharpened since then. The Church urgently needs to take over from where Stephens and other similar pioneers have left off. The Church has realized that all forms of pressure, force and domination will be counter-productive and are best avoided. She has to become truly Catholic by penetrating deep into the socio-cultural, economic, political and religious conditions of the peoples. The Church is a living body and she has to live with the times to remain alive, relevant and meaningful.

The early Church followed the pattern of inculturated and dialogical Christology where a mutual enrichment-correction process took place between the Church, the Roman Empire and the Germanic tribes. A similar approach of adaptation-transformation must be followed in an encounter with other cultures and religions. Stephens concretely worked this out through his ministry and his writings. The Church has to learn new methods of communicating the faith and must adapt new forms of worship, which would be in keeping with the customs, traditions, cultures and religions of the peoples. Such a process should carefully balance the polar values of freedom-fidelity, courage-prudence, modernity-tradition, openness-faithfulness and change-continuity. Stephens' *Kristapurāṇa* is relevant for the Church as we march forward in the new millennium, since it shows us a way to

adaptation and transformation. Stephens dared to integrate important elements of the Hindu Vaiṣṇavaite tradition into the Christian tradition. It has truly been a Christian-Hindu encounter where a mutual enrichment-correction process has taken place. Stephens through his Kristapurāṇa, in a way, has entered the Hindu world and in a way has led the Hindu world into the Christian world.

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# **Joseph Constantine Manalel His Contributions towards the Development of Indian Theology**

**K. T. Sebastian**

## **Joseph, the Dreamer**

Like Joseph in the Old Testament, Joseph Constantine Manalel was a dreamer. At a time when theology was the exclusive domain of the clergy and spirituality was otherworldly, and the church itself was identified with the Bishops and clergy, Joseph the young theologian had his dreams. Many years before Vatican II, he could visualize a church that was people-centered and a theology that could interpret the problems and aspirations of the people. Today we call this contextual or people-centered theology.

## **Constantine, the Visionary**

Joseph who became Constantine on his joining the CMI Congregation (1937) was no longer a dreamer. By the time he became an ordained priest (1946) his religious commitment and priestly vocation did not alienate him from his primary vocation (the baptismal vocation to be a Christian). The young theologian was fully aware that his religious and priestly vocations were for a specific mission. On the occasion of his Sacerdotal Golden Jubilee (1946 - 1996) he wrote "On the occasion of the 81st and 50th year respectively of my participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, basically through baptism and formally through ordination, I am filled with gratitude to God... From my ordination on to this day I have been able to do without intermission some service or other to the Church and society at large."

No doubt the young religious priest was a visionary in the best sense of the term, i.e. “a person who has the ability to think about or plan the future in an intelligent, imaginative way”. He was endowed with a clear vision of what he was going to be in the overall mission of the church. And the mission he chose was the Christian animation of the young world of the students and the teachers through the formation of the Catholic students and the theological education of teachers. The rest is history.

### **Rejuvenation of The KCSL**

In the 1950's he joined the K.C.S.L, at that time Malabar Catholic Students League (MCSL), and played a leading role in the rejuvenation of the decades-old Catholic Students Organization. There was no director during those years but only general spiritual counselors. At the time when Fr. Constantine joined the MCSL, Rev Fr. William, and later Fr Aurelius CMI, were the general spiritual counselors. For nearly three decades after the dynamic and very inspiring leadership of Fr. Honore SJ, whom Malayalee students affectionately called their ‘Pappa’, the League was almost defunct or at best, just nominal. It was at this time the mantle of leadership fell from the Jesuits on to the shoulders of CMI fathers like Rev. Fr. William, Aurelius and Fr. Gratian Mundadan (Later on Bishop of Bijnor). Fr. Constantine, had a crucial role in giving the organization a new lease of life.

It was Fr. William who inducted me to the presidency of the organization. I had just returned from the U.S after my Master's Degree in Catholic Education with dreams of a new era of Catholic education in the state. It was during my tenure the K.C.S.L celebrated its Golden Jubilee at Leo XIII, Alleppey. By the time of the Jubilee (1967) K.C.S.L had become really all Kerala, thanks to the dedicated work of Prof. P.T Thomas, Fr. William, Fr. Aurelius and above all Fr. Constantine Manalel. The Golden Jubilee was a landmark event in the history of the League.

It was during the preparations for the Jubilee I came into close contact with Fr. Constantine. I was impressed by his organizational

ability, clarity of vision and above all his style of functioning. He had a clear plan for the realization of the goals he had in mind. His style of functioning was such that he himself would rather remain behind the curtain. Another thing that impressed me was his perfectionism. Before doing a thing, he would go into all the minute details of it, whether it was editing an article or arranging a consultation, or in less important things like the cleanliness of the crockery and the cutlery at an eating-place. Because of his insistence on thoroughness even in minute things he at times would give the impression of a taskmaster.

### **Catholic Teachers' Guild and Theology Course for the Laity**

While K.C.S.L aimed at the catholic formation of the students, the Teachers' Guild he founded in 1954 and the seminar and theology course for the laity he organized in 1961 were aimed at the theological formation of teachers. Both the programmes were complementary. The Teachers' Guild and theology course for the laity were the first of their kind in India. Though there were movements at that time offering Theology Course for the laity such as the *Adhyayana Mandalam*, the theology course offered by Fr. Constantine was the first systematic attempt in doing theology for the laity. Fr. Constantine's Theology Course aimed at the renewal of the Church through the intellectual and spiritual formation of the teaching community. What he aimed at was the empowerment of Catholic teachers for the renewal of the Church and transformation of society. There is no need to elaborate the prophetic nature of these programmes. He was certainly responding to the 'signs of the times'. Let me give just one example: The general theme of the 1966 Catholic Teachers' seminar was 'Aggiornamento of the Church in Kerala'. This was just one year after the formal closing of the Vatican II. As all of us know *Aggiornamento* or 'updating' was at the heart of Pope John XXIII when he convoked the Council. It was this spirit of *aggiornamento*, which prompted Fr. Constantine to launch *Jeevadhara* (a journal of Christian interpretation) and later *the Indian Theological*

*Association.* His journey as a theologian was in the path of the Council, guided by the spirit of renewal. Even at 90, Fr. Constantine's mind is young and dynamic. He seems to remind us the words of the poet Browning - "Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, the last of Life, for which the first was made".

### **From Aggiornamento to Contextual Theology**

One of the unique features of Vatican II was that it could never end because aggiornamento or the process of updating initiated by the Council is never ending. Updating or renewal is an ongoing process. Since the world is continuously in a state of flux, 'The Church too has to keep itself updating', otherwise it will become irrelevant or obsolete. Lawrence Cardinal Sheehan begins his introduction to the Documents of Vatican II (edited by Walter Abbot SJ) thus: 'The King is dead, long live the King.' In a similar sense it could be said, "The council is over, the council has just begun". It was to ensure the continuity of the council and its spirit of Aggiornamento the Synod of Bishops was instituted by Pope Paul VI in 1965.

Aggiornamento is a challenging task for theologians, the clergy as well as the laity. It is an undeniable fact that our seminary education does very little to promote 'theologizing', which demands creative thinking in an atmosphere of freedom. The seminaries are, by and large institutions for priestly or religious formation (the formation of the 'religious') rather than centers of theological reflection, which is given only as part of it. Today theologizing as such has become the function of specialists who have had their training in Rome or elsewhere in Europe. Cut away from the fast changing socio-economic realities of the country many of them become incapable of promoting a contextual theology.

Another aspect of theologizing in our country is its clericalization, which is a legacy of the Pre-Vatican Church. This is in spite of the fact that the first great theologians in the Church were mainly laymen. We have the examples of Justin, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria. A great many of the early theologians started their theological work

as laymen and were made priests (sometimes even against their will) only later. Thus we have the examples of Cyprian, Basil, Jerome and Augustine.

In Europe and America at least in the latter half of 20th century many lay theologians emerged. In these countries there are facilities and opportunities for the theological education of lay people. India lags far behind western countries in this area. Here, lay theologians are a 'rare breed'. Theology in our country is almost the exclusive domain of the clergy. The result is, even today, our theology is clerical; i.e., written mainly from the clerical experience and mindset.

To my mind to be a theologian is a charism, and ministerial priesthood an office. It is well and good if a priest is also a good theologian but that may not be always the case. Here comes the relevance of the theology course for the laity, and the theological journal *Jeevadhara*, Indian Theological Association and the promotion of contextual theology under the charismatic leadership of Fr. Constantine Manalel. The challenge of contextual theology is to scrutinize the signs of the time (G.S. No. 4), to be able to respond to the problems and challenges of contemporary world and to interpret "the substance of the ancient doctrines of the deposit of faith" (John XXIII) in a way that will be understood by the ordinary people. This is what *Jeevadhara* has been doing from its very beginning. It is significant that the original subtitle of *Jeevadhara* was 'A Journal of Christian interpretation.' Though this subtitle has now been changed to 'A journal for Socio-religious Research', the original purpose of Christian interpretation remains unchanged.

### ***Jeevadhara* - Recollections of the Early Days**

When Fr. Constantine launched *Jeevadhara* it was by far the best theological journal in the country. As one of the associates of Fr. Constantine from the very beginning, I clearly remember the meticulous preparation he made at every stage of publication of each issue. Even though each issue was the responsibility of a section editor Fr. Constantine as General Editor had an overview of the

contents of each number. When the topic was of a very serious nature and one of great public interest Fr. Constantine, as General Editor, would arrange a meeting of experts on the subject and members of the editorial board. Such consultative meetings, though expensive and difficult to organize, were useful and helped the Theology Center to become a real center of theologizing.

From the very beginning Fr. Constantine was meticulous in editing each issue. For this he would secure the expertise of the most competent persons available in the country. To give just one example: during the early years of the journal its language editor (English) was Prof. C. A. Sheppard, the well known English Professor and Grammarian of St Berchmans College, Changanacherry. Fr. Constantine's perfectionism was evident on every page of every issue of the Journal (English as well as Malayalam). This 'Constantine touch' has been kept alive throughout the subsequent years. Another aspect of the Constantine tradition was the care with which he chose his collaborators. Jeevadhara, as Fr. Constantine admits, was never a one man show. He succeeded in making this journal a reputed theological magazine, mainly because of the careful choice of the board of editors, and the selection of contributors for each topic. Among his collaborators, section editors and authors of articles, we come across a galaxy of eminent theologians and scholars such as John Chethimattam, Samuel Rayan, Kurian Kunnumpuram, George Soares-Prabhu, Joseph Pathrapankal, K. Luke, Sebastian Kappen, Felix Podimattam, Felix Wilfred, Paul Puthenangady, Mathew Vellanickal, Mathias Mundadan, Kuncheria Pathil Sebastian Painadath, GeorgeKarakunnel, Mathew Paikada, Xavier Koodapuzha, Dominic Veliath, Jacob Parappally and many others. This is only a cursory look at the list of editors and authors. There are several others of equal competence and reputation to assist him.

### **Indian Theological Association**

Perhaps the single greatest contribution of Fr. Constantine Manalel to Indian Theology was the founding of the Indian Theological

Association in 1976. While the main objective of the 'CHURCH IN INDIA SEMINAR' (1969 Bangalore) was the implementation of the teaching of Vatican II in the context of the Indian Church, the founding of the Indian Theological Association marked the beginning of theologizing in the Indian context. This Association paved the way for theologization, not only in the spirit of the Council, but also in the context of the realities of the Indian Church and the problems and challenges of the sub-continent. It also marked a paradigm shift from doing theology from the centuries-old western tradition to a new way of theological reflection based on the socio-religious and cultural realities of India. In short, it was the birth of 'Indian Theology'. Hitherto there was only one theology in India as elsewhere in the catholic world which was basically western (Roman) rooted and nourished in the historical and cultural context of Europe. When the Indian Theological Association was launched at the initiative of Fr. Constantine in Hyderabad (1976) there was no other forum for Catholic theologians in India for the study and discussion of matters of common interest. In the spirit of the Vatican Council and its commitment to *aggiornamento*, each year ITA made in-depth studies of important issues of topical interest affecting the Church in India as a whole. But the priority was given to issues related to human rights and the plight of the poor and the marginalized.

The methodology of the annual seminar was one of theological reflection and investigation facilitated by the presentation of papers by experts, open discussion in the general assembly and above all, through workshops where the participants shared their views and concerns freely. A glimpse into the themes of the ITA and the statements, which emerged at the end of the seminars prompt me to highlight some of the main features of the ITA:

### ***Relevance and Topicality***

The themes chosen for the theologization by the association were remarkable for their relevance and topicality in the past 26 years of its history (Ref: *Theologizing in Context*, edited by Jacob Parappally,).

### ***Investigative Methodology***

The investigative or explorative nature of the deliberations is evident from the titles of the themes/statements. A few examples to substantiate this aspect are given below.

Searching for an Indian Ecclesiology (1983)

Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation (1985)

Towards a Theology of Religion: An Indian Christian Response (1988)

Towards an Indian Christian Spirituality in a Pluralistic Context (1990)

The issue of "Rites" in the Indian Church (1993)

A Christian response to religious tensions in our Country (1994)

The Church in India in search of a New Identity (1996)

Ecological Crisis: An Indian Christian Response (1997)

Challenge of Hindutva: An Indian Christian Response (2000)

Society and Church; Challenges to Theologizing in India Today (2003)

It may be of interest to note that many of the above titles begin with the word 'Towards'. Similarly the word 'Response' in the title also shows the investigative nature of the Seminar themes.

### ***Looking into the Future***

Another dimension of the theologizing by the ITA is its attempt to look into the 21st century and even beyond. For example the theme for the 1995 seminar was "A Future Vision for an Indian Theology" and for 1999 the theme was "Hope at the Dawn of 21st Century".

### ***Concern for the Poor and the Marginalized***

Here I wish to add that in the last few years the ITA has shown remarkable concern for the marginalized in the Church and society at large. Thus we had 'Women's Concern' for 2004 and 'Dalit Concern' for 2005 and finally last year (2006) 'The identity of the Laity and their mission in the Church'.

### ***Praxis-Oriented Approach***

When Fr. Constantine took the initiative in founding the Indian Theological Association what he envisaged was not a 'talking shop'. In his vision statement (Inaugural Address) presented before the group of theologians who were to become the founder-members of the ITA, in January 1976 in Hyderabad, he said, 'Nobody wants an association which is but another addition to the already existing institutions and is satisfied with an annual gathering and a report in the papers. We want an association of ever-thinking and ever-living men and women, not satisfied with theorizing in the air, but translating into practice what is preached...' (Ref. page 9 Theologizing in Context) This concern of Fr. Constantine is quite understandable in the historical context of the Church. We are reminded of the words of Fr. Schillebeeckx "The Church has for centuries devoted her attention to formulating truths, and meanwhile, did almost nothing to better the world. In other words, the Church focused on orthodoxy and left orthopraxis in the hands of non-members and non-believers (Quoted by Gustavo Gutierrez in his *'A Theology of Liberation'*). In the context of the Indian Church and its specific mission to act as a sign and sacrament of salvation to the teeming millions of the poor and the oppressed in this country, this is very much true. Though Fr. Constantine did not have the reputation of being a radical theologian, his words were prophetic. It was his conviction that theologians who remained merely at the level of words were useless. What he visualized was a down to earth Praxis-Oriented theologization. An appraisal of the papers presented at the ITA seminars and the statements that emerged from them will show that they were not mere words but theological reflections for transformative action. But as a lay person, who has participated in several meetings of CBCI, I wish to say that the ITA statements, like the statements of the C.B.C.I, C.R.I etc and other ecclesial bodies, are very inspiring. But they are lacking in concrete proposals or an action plan. Here let me hasten to admit that the ITA is not an 'action group'! Still, I suppose it can do a lot by way of inspiring and animating the people for social action and justice.

## **Role of the ITA in Promoting Theologizing by the Laity**

### ***Looking into the Past***

Fr. Constantine was right when he wrote in his editorial in the issue on People's Theology (Jeevadhara n.129) that the traditional theology has mostly been unintelligible and theologians were looked upon "as a lot having their heads in the clouds with their feet off the ground." There was a deep gulf between the priest-theologian and the lay people in the past. One reason for unintelligibility of the priest theologians, mostly seminary professors, was the unnecessary use of the scholastic jargons in what they said and wrote. The Teachers' Seminar and the Theology Course for the laity helped a lot in making theology popular at least among the catholic teachers.

But from theology for the laity to theologizing by the laity is still a long way. Even 'theology of the laity' or laicology - dealing with the laity's identity and role in the church, is a new subject (There are seminary professors who have not even heard about laicology).

### ***Theologizing from a Clerical Perspective***

Pre-Vatican theology, by and large was otherworldly. Theology was 'divine' and all other areas of knowledge were considered profane. The church - world dichotomy was quite strong and there was no question of doing theology from a lay perspective, because the laity belonged to the 'world'! Naturally there was no theologization of human problems and realities of the world. Vatican Council was the first Ecumenical Council to include a pastoral theme like 'Church in the Modern World' in its agenda.

### ***Towards a Theology of the World***

The time has come for theologizing on the church-world relation instead of the traditional church-world conflict. Today we have a new 'Theology of the World' (Johannes Metz, 1969) and a theology that Opens to the World (Ref. Alfons Auer's *Open to the World*, 1967) according to which the whole church is at the service of the world; i.e. for the integral development of the human person - material,

spiritual, cultural, etc which according to the council are the concerns of the Church also (GS 3, 64). Another dimension of the new theology is the idea that secularity belongs to the whole church - clergy, religious and laity alike, because the Church is the universal sacrament of the salvation of the whole world. The laity's secularity is specific in the sense that they are the people who live in the world through their secular profession, occupations and family life. But it is not merely the laity who is in the world. The entire church is *in the world and for the world*.

In this context I wish to say 'Jeevadhara's tie up with a secular university (M G University) in 2001 and the transformation of the journal into 'a journal for socio - religious research' was a historic step. The themes of Jeevadhara since this event testify to the people oriented and secular quality of the new Jeevadhara. The latest issue 'Politics - a theological perspective' is a fine example for Theology of the World.

### ***People's Theology and People's Church***

One of the significant contributions of Fr. Constantine to Indian theology has been the promotion of the twin concepts of 'People's Theology' (Ref: Jeevadhara no 129, May 1992) and 'People's Church' (Ref: no.166, Malayalam, August 1998). The issue on people's theology was the outcome of a national seminar on this theme (June 1991). It was on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of this publication. Samuel Rayan's lead article and the final statement of the seminar convey the spirit of what is understood by 'People's Theology'. While traditional theology almost exclusively dealt with faith, morals, the Church etc, and the presentation was from a clerical perspective, People's theology was theologization on the condition of the people particularly the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized. This was in a way the humanization of theology. Fr. Constantine himself was the Section Editor of the volume on 'People's Theology'.

People's theology is, in fact, a corollary of people's church. In the Indian context this is quite relevant (ref: my book on 'The Era of

the lay People', Chapter 9, People's Church: An Ancient Tradition). The Church of Thomas Christians was a people's Church. After the advent of the Portuguese missionaries and under the influence of western theology this ancient Church of apostolic origin lost much of its originality as a people's Church. Jeevadhara has published many articles on this subject both in English and Malayalam. The entire Number of July 1985, edited by Kuncheria Pathil was on 'People's Church'; also no.166(1998), edited by George Karakunnel). The Malayalam edition presents the theme of the people's Church under the title 'Institution of God and Movement of the people', which contains a critical survey by myself entitled 'People's Church Today'.

I have made the above observations to show that theologization in India is no longer the exclusive preserve of the clergy; that lay people too can play a positive role in making Indian theology richer, more authentic and contextual.

### *Lay Participation in Theologizing*

Lay participation at the annual seminars of the ITA has become a regular feature in the last few years. Depending on the nature of the theme, laymen and women and even members of the non-Catholic Churches and at times non-Christians also are invited to participate at the meetings and present papers. This invitation is based on their expertise in the subject. But they are very much like the auditors of the Council meetings and the meetings of the C.B.C.I. The lay participants and the non-catholics and the others feel honoured, and their contributions have been very valuable too. For the ITA, which is almost exclusively an association of priests and religious, the presence of 'outsiders' has been a refreshing and enriching experience.

In April 2006, the ITA's theme was "Laity in the Church: Identity and Mission in India Today". The officials of the ITA made use of the occasion to honour me, and through me the laity, by presenting me a '*Ponnada*'. I was happy. But I shall be happier when steps are taken to induct more and more lay persons into this association and

thus provide an opportunity for them to engage in theologization along with the priests and the religious through exchange of views and sharing of experiences. Let us remember lay participation in theologization is not anything new. The first theologians of the church were lay persons. Priests and religious came into the scene much later. Let us also remember that it was more than a hundred years before Vatican II, Cardinal Newman, one of the greatest intellectuals of the Church wrote his famous thesis; 'On Consulting the Laity on Matters of Faith' (published in the Rambler, 1859 and re-published in 1961). Vatican II went a step further and declared that "The body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy one (Jn 2.20, 27), cannot err in matters of faith thanks to a supernatural "sense of faith" which characterizes the people of God as a whole. (L.G.12). Commenting on this Avery Dulles S.J noted "the idea that 'the sense of the faithful' (*sensus fidelium*) imprinted on their hearts by the Holy Spirit, cannot err, was a favourite theme of Cardinal Newman; who foresaw its importance for the theology of the laity which was in its infancy in his day." (Ref: Documents of Vatican II [Walter Abbot Edition]: L.G. n.12. footnote, n. 40).

### Conclusion

On the occasion of the Navati of Fr. Constantine Manalel, I join his numerous students and the large number of priests and religious whom he guided and inspired in their theological investigations, to congratulate him on his dedicated service to theology in India. As one of the lay disciples of his, I thank him for all that he has done to promote the theological education of the laity in this country.

# **Joseph Constantine Manalel**

## **His Vision and Mission**

**Sunny Maniyakupara**

“With all that is new in the Church, in theology, in fresh thinking, fresh developments, you are associated. I recall this with pride and gratitude... So your contribution to an awakening is what all of us recall with enthusiasm and this gives all of us hope” says T.K John S.J, a highly perceptive Indian Theologian, in the message he sent on the occasion of the *Navati* celebrations of Fr. Joseph Constantine Manalel (hereafter JC). Truly JC has emerged as a towering figure in the Indian Church. If ideas rule the world, persons of great ideas jolt the Church and the society out of slumber. Undoubtedly JC is a man of great vision. In the Indian Church, JC has accomplished a mission, so unique that he has carved a place of pride in its history, so profound in impact that the whole church took note of what he has said and done. It is worth surveying his spectacular achievements in the various fields so that we can measure the breadth and depth of the service he has rendered to the Church and the society at large.

### **Discovery of Jesus**

Ever since his childhood days, JC was precocious in his ways and thoughts. His religious vision dates back to the days of his priestly formation when he sounded the depths of Christian faith in an independent manner. He delved deep into the Christian experience. His solitary yet courageous theological investigations led him to a personal discovery of Jesus of Nazareth. He realized that Jesus was far more than being a meek and humble person, let alone an object of

lazy piety. The official portrayal of Jesus' personality failed to do justice to the radicalism of His message. The religious authorities of his time killed Jesus and rejected his message, for his words and deeds simply flew in the face of their religion. Jesus was the new wine that busted the old wineskins. The earlier Christian community walked the path of Jesus, living in charity and worship. As the Church grew in strength and power, it turned blind to the radicalism of Jesus message. JC resolved to retrieve the lost power of Jesus message and to unleash its liberative potential in the Indian soil so as to pave the way to the Kingdom of God.

JC was convinced that Jesus' message was deeply coloured by Jewish culture and religion and that His words could reap a hundred fold in the Indian soil only if they emerge from the depth of Indian religious experience. Similarly the gap between Jesus' times and ours needed to be bridged lest His words should look outdated and irrelevant.

It was a matter of great satisfaction and a sign of God's Providence that JC could find birds of the same feather. Prominent theologians who entertained Christological ideas similar to those of JC used *Jeevadhara* as a launching pad for their Christological reflections that broke new ground in Indian theologizing. In this connection, quite outstanding are the contributions of Sebastian Kappen, George Soares-Prabhu and Samuel Rayan who pioneered an Indian Christology in tune with the concerns of Indian Church. The impact of the new Christological reflections was evident from an avalanche of criticism that greeted the major Christological articles in *Jeevadhara*.

### **Following Jesus**

Words fail to express how fervently JC yearns for the reign of freedom and truth in the church and for the practice of authority envisioned as service by Jesus. He emerges like a Prophet similar to Moses in courage and equal to Elijah in ardour. He throws his body and soul into the relentless fight for the recovery of freedom and for reinstatement of authority as clearly taught by Jesus. In his fight for

freedom and genuine authority, JC counts no wound; he knows no malice and hostility. Perhaps this explains why the Good Lord has brought him to a moral victory though the fight continues as long as human hearts hanker after power and pleasure.

JC's overriding ecclesiological concerns are twofold: Firstly, all shall enjoy the freedom of the children of God. Never does he compromise on anything that lays axe at the root of this freedom, for he knows what freedom holds in store. Freedom is quite indispensable to follow the stirrings of the Spirit that goes where it wills. Holy Spirit is as free as wind, so must be the children of God; curtailment of this freedom is sinful and it evokes indignation. He says: "without freedom, man cannot lead an authentic life. The less free he is, the more he will be alienated...Freedom is so essential to the Church that without it, she is as good as dead." However he never advocates an irresponsible freedom. He adds: "An irresponsible freedom degenerates into license, is already license." Secondly, JC is deeply anguished by the corruption of power in the Church. He holds that the Church has committed the fatal mistake of swerving from the right path of authority. He laments the travesty that has been made of authority in the Church down the centuries.

Jesus Christ was quite unambiguous in his teaching on authority. He revolutionized the concept of authority as service both by his words and deeds. He forbade his disciples vehemently from exercising the authority prevalent among the secular forces; he washed the feet of his disciples to drive home the new concept of authority. JC believes that it is unchristian and preposterous for Christian authorities to revert to the secular ways of exercising power. This conviction makes him bold and fearless. In the first colloquium between bishops and theologians, he reminded the Bishops and Archbishops present there: "Popes and bishops must shed externally, all appearances of being rulers, and internally all sense of superiority and police-mentality as if they are in office to keep law and order."

Intelligent and insightful as he is, JC has seen the intimate connection between freedom and the right exercise of freedom.

Freedom weathers away in the face of unchristian exercise of authority whereas the presence of freedom in the Church speaks for the right exercise of authority. His eyes are set on the rich fruits that true freedom, nurtured rather than obstructed by the Church, can bear for the people of God. Undoubtedly, *Jeevadhara* itself is a rare fruit of this freedom. What the theologians, both in India and abroad, are enamored of is the freedom this socio-religious journal enjoys. This is its greatest merit, its supreme strength. JC is ever keen on safeguarding this envious freedom. J. B. Chethimattam, an eminent theologian and a close associate of JC, writes: "One of his expressed concerns is the freedom of the theologians of India struggling to find a new path, away from the colonial period India has passed through and the straight jacket of Western theology in which they themselves were trained. Conscious of the tension between the academic and pastoral goals in the Church, he made every effort to see that the *Jeevadhara* was not under the direct control of any bishop or religious superior, who may be too prone to jump in and obstruct any new theological venture as disturbing to the faith of the people. So he registered the *Jeevadhara Theological Society* so that the activities of the theologians could be governed by their own regulations and through peer criticism." (*Jeevadhara* Vol. XXVII No.161, p.316.) The freedom of *Jeevadhara* set theologians free in their expression of viewpoints. Sebastian Painadath S.J, an outstanding Indian theologian, remarks: " *Jeevadhara* is perhaps the only theological journal in India where we can express our reflections freely." This freedom of expression is the fruit of the freedom that JC wants to prevail in the Church. Had *Jeevadhara* not enjoyed the freedom, it could not have blazed untrodden trails in the Indian Church. So any curtailment of freedom in the church leads to abortion of new ideas, suppression of creative minds and estrangement of resourceful persons, thereby paving way for the growth of mediocrity and hypocrisy. In other words worship of God in truth and spirit demands freedom and practice of authority as service. This explains why JC

never ceases from championing the cause of freedom and right exercise of power in the Church.

### **A Life of Freedom and for Freedom**

“The major contribution of Constantine Manalel to theology has been his life,” says Raimon Panikkar, a close friend of JC and one of the greatest religious thinkers of our times. One comes across an admirable correspondence between words and deeds in the life of JC. His life abounds in values he stands for. Free and faithful he goes about his tasks. He enjoys inner freedom. He fears no threat. So he is as free and spontaneous as a child.

First and foremost, JC could be portrayed as a freedom fighter in the Church, i.e for the freedom of expression and for the practice of truth. His long and blessed life spanning more than nine decades is marked by its adherence to truthful practices. He plunged into innumerable activities, interacted with people of all hues and ages, runs an international journal and heads a Movement called *Theology Centre (Jeevadhara)*. Still he leaves behind an unsullied record of service in truth and charity.

Anyone entering the portals of *Jeevadhara Centre* is struck by the simplicity of JC’s life and his Centre. In his forties, fifties and sixties JC was always on the move. Traveling all over Kerala and India at a time when conveyance was woefully inadequate, he started branches of K.C.S.L and Teachers’ Guild which he founded in 1954 in almost all the schools of this state. The latter made for the fruitful exchanges between teachers and students. Ever since he had his Centre at Malloosery, he has been holding innumerable seminars, both regional, national and international that promoted research and dialogue and harmony. Tucked away from the hustle and bustle of Kottayam town, *Jeevadhara Centre* is located in a sleepy village. One is really touched by the serenity and tranquility that permeates the *Jeevadhara Centre*. Many scholars frequent the institute for intellectual and spiritual refreshment. Given the silent but active life

of JC and the calm ambience of Jeevadhara Centre, one is tempted to compare JC to an Indian *muni* and his institute to an Indian *ashram*.

JC's fight for truth and freedom has cost him dearly. He has known days of hardships owing to his refusal to compromise on his ideals. In his own words "in penury rather than in plenty," he has been championing his cause and upholding his ideals. He came in for severe criticism and virulent opposition from many quarters. But he still remains unfazed and relentless in his fight for truth and freedom.

### Indian Theology

Indian Theology is a long cherished dream of JC. In the introductory note to the first issue of *Jeevadhara* in 1971, he noted: "One of the concerns of *Jeevadhara* will be to help in evolving an Indian theology, biblical in its emphasis, ecumenical in its ambit, in the background of the Indian way of life and thought." The fourth issue of *Jeevadhara*, edited by Samuel Ryan, was wholly dedicated to the issue of Indian Christology in the broader context of Indian Theology. Drawing up the contours of an Indian Theology, Samuel Rayan says: "One of the pressing concerns which *Jeevadhara* shares with many thinking men in our country, and perhaps abroad too, is about the need to help emerge a body of theological thought that will be truly Indian in inspiration, approach, tone and resonance." (No. 3, 1971). He also quotes Cardinal Gracias who, in a letter sent to JC, remarked: "It strikes me that an excellent line is being explored by your editorials and writers in so much as this review will be the occasion and opportunity for research which is absolutely necessary in India".

The question of an Indian theology arises in the context of a pluralism of theologies found in Christianity. As the Good News encounters different peoples, their cultures, philosophies and literature, a mutual influence is inevitable, that in turn, impels Christianity to assume different expressions without compromising on its essentials. In such a situation, the encounter between Christianity and India holds out tremendous possibilities. In view of such promising opportunities, JC mooted the idea of an Indian Theology and threw open the forum of *Jeevadhara* for sowing the seeds of an Indian Theology.

It is heartening to note that prominent theologians of India who shared the concerns of JC made weighty contributions towards the growth of Indian Theology through their original and thought provoking articles. Worth mentioning are the names of Raimon Panikkar, John Britto Chethimattam, Sebastian Kappen, Samuel Ryan, Soares Prabhu, and others.

### **Towards a Down-to-Earth Theology**

One of the major concerns of JC is his extraordinary empathy with the burning issues of the people. His heart is deeply moved and disturbed by the cries of the poor and the needy. So any theology that falls flat on the lives of the poor is dismissed as quite irrelevant by him. That is why he clamours for a theology that is best informed and shaped by the various life-issues of the ordinary people. He makes his standpoint very clear in the introduction to the first issue of *Jeevadhara*. He comments: "Theology must be linked with life, so live problems will be dealt with in these pages. An attempt will be made to give, in the light of theology, answers to questions that arise in different spheres of human activity and at crucial moments when people find themselves in two minds about the proper way to think or act. The choice of topics, therefore, will be determined by the needs of the reader rather than the academic interest of the specialist. The treatment of the topics will be such as to carry what is said dynamically into the reader's life instead of dealing in curious dialectics." (Page7).

Having thrown in his lot with the poor and the downtrodden, he plunged into manifold activities in order to convert Malloossery, his own adopted village, into a self-reliant one. His work went on successfully for five years. Later his activity was cut short for reasons beyond his control. Similarly quite early to the emergence of Liberation Theology on a global scale, he raised the issue of liberation of the oppressed from the clutches of the oppressors through the pages of *Jeevadhara*.

On a personal level, the JC has no option but to love and stand for the poor. The hapless ones have known that his heart beats for

them. That is why they pour into his Centre seeking his help and counsel and he, in turn, gives them a patient listening and invites them even to share his table.

### **A Friend and Guide of Indian Theologians**

In the year of 1976, JC turned a milestone in the history of Indian Theology by the foundation of the "Indian Theological Association" (ITA). It was inaugurated at *Jeevan Jyoti*, Hyderabad just after the first dialogue between Bishops and Theologians. He was unanimously elected as its first President. Under his leadership, Indian Theologians emerged as a force to be reckoned with both in India and abroad. Through his winsome and unassuming ways, he could win the hearts of the best Indian theologians. His success story is inextricably interwoven with his association with major Indian theologians. When the like-minded theologians came together, they could conquer new heights in theology. Through the 'concert' of Indian Theologians, JC could realize his overarching vision of which the embodiments are *Jeevadhara* and ITA.

Besides the above-mentioned contributions, it is noteworthy that JC could trigger new currents of thoughts in the fields of Bible Interpretation, Education, Women's Liberation, moral issues, priestly formation etc.

### **Conclusion**

In short JC is great in words and deeds. His versatile personality and manifold activities and achievements spanning over several decades cannot be subsumed under a single epithet; he is a visionary, prophet, sage, pioneer, theologian, thinker, writer, speaker, leader and activist - all rolled into one. It takes centuries for the birth of such persons like JC. Looking back, he has every reason to feel satisfied. Joining the hymn of Blessed Virgin Mary, he can exclaim: "God has done great things for me." But with his face brightening up, he whispers: "I have many more dreams and projects in my mind." Well, he has miles to go before he sleeps. His mission remains unfinished. Amazingly, uncommon energy still surges in him.



